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MAGNUS WEBER

RELIGION AS A LIFEWORLD

An Alternative to a Secularist Concept of Religion in Social Work

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ABSTRACT

The discourse on religious extremism and jihadism has stimulated deep interest in religion as a factor in social problems. So have other religion-related issues such as honour-related violence, migration and integration, and female circumcision. Given that social workers are often mentioned as pivotal actors when it comes to preventing and working long-term with extremism, radicalisation, and related issues, religion has acquired increased visibility in social work. This has reinvigorated discourse on religion within social work practice, policy and research.

This dissertation attempts to grapple with and theorise about the implications of this new visibility of religion in social work. Its starting point is an analysis of the tacit assumptions about religion revealed in interviews with practitioners in the field of preventing violent extremism and promoting democracy. Genealogical analysis then contextualises these tacit, secular assumptions in a historical, philosophical and theological setting, so denaturalising them. This work clears the way for developing a new and innovative path that holds promise for more productive work in relation to religious social problems.

The main argument in this dissertation is that a secularist concept of religion falls short when doing social work with religious citizens. This is because a secularist concept of religion regards religion either as a set of doctrines or teachings or as purely subjective and emotional. Practitioners who take the former position often try to disprove specific doctrines, as if doctrines produce religious extremists. Practitioners who adopt the latter position try to change the inner inclinations of the subjects from, say, an extremist disposition to a democratic one, or from radical Islam to 'mainstream' Islam. Both approaches are inadequate because by depriving religion of its bodily and institutional setting, religion is reduced solely to its intellectual or emotional elements, while overlooking its practical, social, institutional and embodied aspects.

The alternative conceptualisation of religion proposed in this dissertation is rooted in phenomenology. If religion is conceived of as a horizon of meaning that precedes and supersedes individual choice and preference, while simultaneously being construed as contextual and open to reinterpretation, encounters between social workers and religious clients can be guided by openness, interest and curiosity, even reconciliation. Change could, then, be achieved from within the clients' lifeworld, rather than through confrontation and the advocating of drastic alternatives to their present lifeworld. Such an approach to social work with religious clients is likely to be more successful than one rooted in a much narrower understandings of religion.

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I have been accompanied by this dissertation for more than four years now. Or haunted by it, more correctly. I cannot count the number of times I have woken up in the middle of the night, quickly scribbling down a few notes that I believe can change the whole trajectory of my work only to realise that I have written this in my dissertation already. The term 'reinventing the wheel' may be the most fitting description of writing a dissertation, at least in my case. I have thought about my dissertation at work, at the gym, on vacations, I have discussed it over a beer with friends. To say that it is a relief to leave it is an understatement. However, although leaving the text is a wonderful relief, it is a bittersweet one. If only I had time to go over it a few more times…

It is imperative to have colleagues, supervisors and friends to talk to, discuss problems with and be comforted by. Without such people, one would likely go mad in the process of writing a dissertation. For me, the situation got sour when the COVID-19 pandemic made all personal contact impossible. And indeed, I felt like I was going mad there for a while. During one period of solitude, in combination with hard work, I began to doubt myself immensely. Had it not been for the support I received from my family, from colleagues, and from my supervisors, there would be no text. It is thus perhaps only in retrospect that one realises how all the hard work of writing a dissertation in solitude, in fact is anything but a sole work. Is the dissertation really mine to own? If one wishes to exaggerate, then perhaps Foucault is correct in stating that the author is dead. Am I nothing but a point or a node in a discursive formation? To be honest, who cares!? The text is done, and I can only hope that new and exciting things awaits.

I would like to thank a few of the people who have contributed to this dissertation. To begin with, I would like to thank the participants of the study for have giving me their time and their efforts in explaining their work to me. It goes without saying that

this dissertation could not be written without you. It is all the more difficult to critically scrutinise the interviews, which I believe is my job as a researcher, when people are loving and giving in the manner that the participants have been. This is a difficult dilemma indeed, and one that most qualitative researchers encounter, or so I believe. Anyway, thank you for participating in this study.

I have had the pleasure of working together with a few supervisors who have, in their own ways, contributed significantly to my work and my well-being during this period. The first person I want to mention is my main supervisor, Carin Cuadra. Carin has, without exception, encouraged me to explore my own paths as she has offered me a steady hand in my travels into the unknown. I could not have asked for a more loyal, wise, and perceptive supervisor. She has given me useful comments, and she has taken her time to read and comment my work carefully.

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In addition, I have had the pleasure of being supervised by Ola Sigurdson. Ola began as an opponent on my halftime seminar, after which I asked him to join the team. Despite knowing nothing about social work research, Ola accepted. I am always greatful that he did, and he has proven absolutely instrumental for me. As an expert in everything theoretical, Ola has hopefully helped me to steer clear from the many mistakes I otherwise would have made (a few mistakes most likely remain, but Ola should not be held accountable for those).

As the mindful reader can see then, the combination of Carin, Marcus and Ola has been something of a dream team. But there are other people who have helped me along the way. I would like to thank Torbjörn Friberg, who was my supervisor for the first half of the process. Torbjörn helped me develop the empirical study, with knowledge and skill. I would also like to thank Lovisa Bergdahl, Södertörn Högskola, and Erica Righard, Malmö University, for giving me invaluable comments and suggestions during the final seminar of the text. Tapio Salonen also deserves to be mentioned here. Tapio read my work carefully in the final stage of the process and gave me valuable advice. With eagle-eyes, Tapio helped me to develop and sharpen my argumentation and bring it closer to social work. I am very thankful that you all took the time to read my work carefully.

I further want to take the opportunity of thanking the Department of Social Work at the University of Gothenburg for allowing me to house there for quite a long period of time and for making me feel welcome and at home at the department. I have also

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All of my colleagues and particularly my fellow doctoral students have continuously and throughout the process provided me with support, helpful comments during seminars and, most importantly, a sense of being a part of something (the term 'life-world' comes to mind here). Two of these deserve special mentioning: Ylva Grönvall and Angelica Wågby. In you, I have found not only colleagues and intellectual sparring partners, but hopefully lifelong friends. Our many talks and late nights have meant the world to me.

The work would have been unbearable without the love and support from my family. My parents, Linda and Anders, and my sister Sandra, have supported me constantly. Without your support, I would not have been able to go through with this. You have comforted me, supported me and encouraged me to go on, not only with the dissertation but in my life in general.

This dissertation is dedicated to my true love, Boel. Without you, this whole endeavour would have been pointless. Thank you for constantly reminding me that there is a world outside of the dissertation. And an important one, to say the least. ♥♥♥♥

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

Something that I read in a Swedish newspaper has stayed with me and fascinated me, haunted me almost, throughout my work on this dissertation. Although I cannot remember the exact words, it went something like this: 'In the midst of all the misery and chaos of the ISIS-controlled caliphate, the Quran is nowhere to be found.' Rhetoric such as this was common in public discussions during the most intense debates on IS radicalisation. A well-rehearsed argument was that although young people who leave their homes to participate in violent acts of war in Syria or elsewhere claim to be motivated by religious imperatives, their religious faith is often merely a pretext. The case is made that religious extremists are quite illiterate when it comes to religion. Ergo, religion is not a cause for extremism, it is merely an excuse.

What strikes the eye about this formulation is how very difficult it is for secular citizens to understand religion. So much so that it needs to be dichotomised into two antagonistic and irreconcilable explanations: either religion is the cause of extremism or religion is nothing more than rhetoric. The first argument draws its sustenance from a vision of Islamic terrorism as the true face of Islam, an argument that alludes to Samuel Huntington's vision of civilisational conflicts as the number one characteristic of the post-Cold War condition.[1] Translated into an explanation for radicalisation, the argument goes something like this: Islamic extremism is a radical form of the barbaric ways of Islam in general. Islamic radicalisation is rooted, most fundamentally, in Islam's hatred of the free societies of the West. That is to say, the dark face of ISIS is nothing new, it merely reveals the same dark but hidden core of Islam itself. In the other corner we have the diametrically opposite argument that religion is merely a pretext for radicalisation, a rhetorical strategy used to pursue a different agenda entirely. ISIS warriors, for example, are motivated by adventure, politics and structural marginalisation. More drastically, not only are ISIS warriors motived by something other than religion, they are scarcely religious at all. Their religion is fundamentally empty, nothing more than pretextual rhetoric. Religion is thus, in one corner, the only available explanation, whereas in the other corner, theology provides no explanations at all since terrorists' religious talk is empty rhetoric.

[1] Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilization and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011).

The formulation that 'the Quran is nowhere to be found' needs to be read in the light of this intense polemic. I wish to bring some clarity to matters concerning religion as I try to nuance and problematise this dualistic view of religion and Islam. By bringing some nuance and complexity to the discussion, I hope to show that we are by no means forced to choose between two drastic alternatives. Islamic terrorism may very well be defined as religious without ontologising violence, making it the heart of religion itself.

In this discussion, my main influence is the American theologian William T. Cavanaugh who argues against dichotomies by problematising the very ground on which these two alternatives rest. Cavanaugh's argument is that the myth of religious violence – a myth both because it is empirically unsubstantiated and because it serves as a framework for sense-making in the West – is motivated by liberal/secular agendas to marginalise religious discourse. Rather than analysing under what conditions an ideology becomes violent, irrespective of whether it is religious or secular, the myth promotes investigation into the nature of a religious tradition and its potential for violence. Both those arguing that extremism is the true face of Islam and those arguing that Islam has nothing to do with violence operate with an equally essentialist concept of religion. Cavanaugh explains:

> People who identify themselves as religious sometimes argue that the real motivation behind so-called religious violence is in fact economic and political, not religious. Others argue that people who do violence are, by definition, not religious. The Crusader is not really a Christian, for example, because he does not really understand the meaning of Christianity. I do not think that either of these arguments works. In the first place, it is impossible to separate religious from economic and political motives in such a way that religious motives are innocent of violence. How could one, for example, separate religion from politics in Islam, when most Muslims themselves make no such separation? […] In the second place, it may be the case that the Crusader has misappropriated the true message of Christ, but one cannot therefore excuse Christianity of all responsibility. Christianity is not simply a set of doctrines immune to historical circumstance, but a lived historical experience embodied and shaped by the empirically observable actions of Christians.[2]

Cavanaugh draws attention here to the problem of falling into the traps of dichotomisation. The problem with a vision of religion as either eminently violent or eminently peaceful is that is fails to acknowledge and identify plasticity and situatedness in religion, instead portraying religion as rigid systematisations. This insight provided by

[2] William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 5.

Cavanaugh into the problem of secular notions of religion has been influential as I have worked on my dissertation. The alternative view Cavanaugh alludes to above – religion as lived, historical experience – has motivated the view of religion endorsed in this dissertation: religion understood phenomenologically, as a lifeworld.

While working on and writing this dissertation, I came to realise that work to prevent extremism is one of the ways in which religion has been (re)introduced in social work more generally. The discourse on religious extremism, and on social problems such as honour-related violence, immigration, and female circumcision,[3] has come to actualise religion as a topic of investigation within social work. This new visibility of religion in social work calls for and has actualised critical and constructive theoretical work.

If social work is to remain relevant as a theoretical discipline, we need a more solid theoretical ground on matters concerning religion, broadly conceptualised. Arguing that there is a deficiency in social work when it comes to theoretical work in general and religion in particular, this dissertation embarks on a critical dialogue drawing on empirical material, theory and the history of theology and philosophy. By drawing contemporary ideas and tacit assumptions about religion into critical dialogue with religion's genealogical origin, I try to rethink and re-evaluate present dilemmas and impasses concerning religion in social work. To put it more precisely, investigations into the history of the concept of religion can allow us to find new and innovative paths to work with religion in social work by breaching the discursive constraints imposed on us.

Framing the Argument: Religion's Visibility in Social Work

Before getting into the heart of the matter, something must be said about why a study of this kind is warranted at all. In this section, I provide an argument for why religion needs to be studied and reflected upon in social work. Social work, both as a field of practice and theoretical discipline, increasingly identifies and works with religion. This increased visibility of religion in social work calls for theoretical work that investigate the premises of working with religion in social work.

In Western societies, religion, though long thought to be superseded and dispensed with, has begun to resurface. The assertion that modern societies have dispensed with religion through a form of linear progression – from religious to modern/secular – no

[3] For example, through notifications of concern to the social services. For a Swedish example, see; https://www.socialstyrelsen.se/stod-i-arbetet/vald-och-brott/konsstympning/. For a detailed discussion of the roles of religion and culture when it comes to female circumcision, see for example Sara Johnsdotter Carlbom, 'Created by God: How Somalis in Swedish Exile Reassess the Practice of Female Circumcision' (PhD diss., Lund University, 2002).

longer seems to hold true.[4] In fact, religion thrives in modernity,[5] and not merely in vague spiritual and privatised forms: religion has become an ineluctable constituent of modern politics. To be more precise, religion did not actually make its way back. Religion was never really gone in the first place. It is rather that the rhetoric of secularism has made the public blind to the religious. The American historian Brad Gregory offers an elegant formulation:

> Some scholars in recent years have expressed a certain wonderment that 'religion is back'; the wonder is rather that it was thought ever to have departed, apart from the 'scholarly wish fulfilment' or projections of those who accepted classic theories of modernization and secularization.[6]

The term *post-secular* can be said to describe exactly this epistemic change in which religion can no longer be made invisible in public matters.[7] It refers principally to an abandonment of the secularisation narrative, that is to say, to an epistemic change in how to understand the relation between modernisation and secularisation[8] which has for so long provided Westerners with a pair of glasses unable to identify anything other than 'private' religion.

Social work has been affected by this trend. Whereas it was once almost oblivious to religion, certain social problems have reintroduced religion as a topic of importance within social work. Radicalisation and violent extremism, honour-related violence, work with migration and integration, female circumcision and work with families are all examples of how a social work agenda becomes entangled with discourses on religion. In chapter 2 I develop the argument that work to prevent extremism is a salient case of how religion is being made visible again, but in order to convince my readers that this is not the only issue, let me instead illustrate this point with a very brief discussion of honour-related violence. A Swedish governmental report about honour criminality states:

> Research shows that there is no automatic link between religious affiliation and honour violence and oppression, and that the phenomenon is not associated with a

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[4] Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden, City NY: Doubleday, 1969); José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

[5] Ola Sigurdson, *Det postsekulära tillståndet: Religion, modernitet, politik* (Göteborg: Glänta produktion, 2009), 8.

[6] Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge/London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012), 13.

[7] See Jürgen Habermas, 'Notes on a Post-Secular Society', *New Perspectives Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (2008): 16–29, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5842.2008.01017.x; Austin Harrington, 'Habermas and the "Post-Secular Society",' *European Journal of Social Theory* 10, no. 4 (2007): 543–560, https://doi.org/10.1177/1368431007084370; Khaled Furani, "Is There a Postsecular?", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 83, no. 1 (2015): 1–26, https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfu082; Sigurdson, *Det postsekulära.*

[8] See Sigurdson, *Det postsekuära*; Hans Joas, *Do We Need Religion? On the Experience of Self-Transcendence*, trans. Alex Skinner (Boulder, Colorado: Paradigm Publishers, 2008), chapter 8.

> specific religion. Honour-based oppression is, in other words, present in many cultures and religions, but is more common amongst people with origins in certain regions.[9]

The crux of the matter seems to be the prevalence of patriarchal structures and traditional worldviews, not religious intensity or conviction.[10]

However, not everyone agrees. In a paper on sexual moralism in Sweden, Pernilla Ouis suggests that repudiation of the links between Islam and honour is an oversimplification, and insists that 'honour-based norms gain de facto legitimacy in Islamic morality'.[11] This does not imply that such norms are to be enforced by individuals. In Islamic countries, honour-related crimes are brought before Islamic courts. However, there are no such courts in Sweden, with the result that people may take matters into their own hands. Ouis then points to the relevance of this for social work. She argues that social work needs to be aware of the role sacred texts may play in people's lives, and suggests that some Swedish Muslims feel more closely linked to Islamic morality and law than to the Swedish penal system. In the context of social work, as Ouis sees it, people working in social services would benefit from being more knowledgeable in Islamic law, particularly when it comes to issues such as marriage, divorce and custody conflicts.[12]

These are only a few extracts from a much wider and more complex debate, and I have no intention of providing a complete picture of this discussion. The point is that religion is involved in work with families and with honour-related issues. If social work is to take issues such as honour, violent extremism and female circumcision seriously, and I believe that it should, then it is vital that we have a firm theoretical ground to stand on. In Ouis's argument, sacred texts play an important role in some citizens' life. This is true, but when making such claims, it is imperative to have a firm theoretical basis and understanding of the role doctrines and sacred texts play in a religious person's life. This is by no means a trivial issue. On the contrary, it involves quite complex theoretical discussion, as I show in more detail later in this dissertation. In chapter 3 I suggest that doctrines are not unchangeable and contextless rules to be slavishly followed, as is often assumed when religion is reduced solely to its doctrinal or propositional content. In my view, doctrines are one of the ways in which meaning

[9] Parliament of Sweden, 'Ökat skydd mot hedersrelaterad brottslighet' (SOU 2018:69), (Statens Offentliga Utredningar, 2018), 69, my translation.
[10] Fakir M. Al Gharaibeh, 'Debating The Role of Custom, Religion and Law in "Honour" Crimes: Implications for Social Work,' *Ethics & Social Welfare* 10, no. 2 (2016): 122–139, https://doi.org/10.1080/17496535.2016.1155632.
[11] Pernilla Ouis, '"Den verkliga kulturkonflikten"? Islamisk sexualmoralism i liberala Sverige,' *Socialvetenskaplig Tidskrift* 16, no. 3-4 (2009): 353, my translation, https://doi.org/10.3384/SVT.2009.16.3-4.2493.
[12] Ouis, 'Den verkliga kulturkonflikten', 365.

is established by a community of believers, functioning almost like a grammar for how to construe the world. Thus, sacred texts do indeed play a central role for religious citizens, but perhaps not necessarily in the form of strict rules or as a collection of 'facts'. This further points to the argument that doctrines are shaped within a cultural and social context and are thus always open to change and interpretation. It is important, I think, to have these nuances in mind when working with social problems related to religion.

To return to the argument of this section, honour-related violence provides us with an impetus to conduct theoretical work on the issue of religion. The same can also be said about work with integration and unaccompanied minors, which in another way has actualised and made the religious more visible within social work. In work with integration in relation to Islamic citizens, integration often becomes almost synonymous with instilling and cultivating gender equality, which is seen as one of the most prominent features of Western values. And vice versa, gender inequality is often identified as the main feature of cultures other than Western, particularly when it comes to Islam. On this logic, gender equality is believed to be anathema to certain cultures and religions. Sarah Farris considers this to be the apex of liberal reasoning and she says that civic integrations policies often assumes that there are misogynistic structures in Muslim communities, a preconception that shapes the view even of non-Western migrants in general.[13] As such, nationalism, liberalism, and secularism coalesce around issues of sexual liberation and gender equality, often through the view that Islam is eminently misogynistic. Religion thus becomes an unavoidable issue for integration policy as it is thought to constitute a threat to Western values in the form of gender equality. I discuss and problematise this assumption in the dissertation too, most directly in chapter 6.

When it comes to unaccompanied minors, a now widely discussed topic in Sweden, religion has been considered as both a tool or coping mechanism for integration[14] and an impediment to integration.[15] An important aspect, in line with Farris's argument, is that 'young people in Sweden with a background in countries where Islam is the dominant religion must deal with the fact that they are interpreted through an anti-

[13] Sarah R. Farris, *In the Name of Women's Rights: The Rise of Femonationalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 3.
[14] Muireann Ní Raghallaigh and Robbie Gilligan, 'Active Survival in the Lives of Unaccompanied Minors: Coping Strategies, Resilience, and the Relevance of Religion,' *Child & Family Social Work* 15, no. 2 (2010): 226–37, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2206.2009.00663.x.
[15] Elin Ekström, Pia H. Bülow and Monika Wilinska, '"I Don't Think You Will Understand Me Because Really, I Believe": Unaccompanied Female Minors Re-Negotiating religion', *Qualitative Social Work: Research and Practice* 19, no. 4 (2020): 719–35, https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325019848481.

other discourse that constructs Islam as threatening and strange'.[16] When arriving in a secular country such as Sweden, they constantly needs to explain and even defend their faith, which means that ideas of religion and secularism directly shape integration processes and practices. From this, and in relation to social work, Ekström, Bülow and Wilinska propose that insights into the complexities of religion in the lives of unaccompanied minors could contribute to a more holistic approach.[17] Thus, regardless of whether religion is primarily seen as an obstacle or a resource in integration, whether continuity or flexibility and transformation of a religious identity is highlighted, religion has become a vital constituent in the discourse and work with integration processes in general. If we are to avoid merely repeating triumphalist reasoning by affirming the superiority of Western secular/liberal values, which Farris has shown is a common approach to religion in integration policy, we are in need of nuanced and theoretically grounded notions of religion.

As we have seen in relation to both integration/unaccompanied minors and honour, religion has become visible in the sense of being the subject of intense debate and controversy. Despite there being no consensus regarding the actual role religion plays in relation to social problems, the sheer fact that religion emerges in these debates, and in the practical endeavours in social work, signals that religion is increasingly discernible in social work. This is why I believe it to be reasonable to speak of a post-secular turn in social work. To further ground this argument, let me illustrate by providing accounts of another way that religion emerges in social work. Contemporary social work can be said to be affected by what is sometimes referred to as the neo-liberal withdrawal of the state.[18] Meeuwisse and Sunesson argue that we are witnessing a crisis of the welfare state and that 'the reason why non-governmental organisations are emphasised and ascribed a range of positive values (e.g. humanitarianism, warmth, engagement, creativity, spontaneity, flexibility, autonomy, and democracy) is tied to the crisis of the welfare state and its economic, political and moral signatures.'[19] Civil society is now seen as a complement to the welfare state in that it embodies values and practices that the welfare state can (no longer) be said to hold.

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[16] Marcus Herz and Philip Lalander, '"Unaccompanied Minors" in Sweden Reflecting on Religious Faith and Practice', *Journal of Youth Studies* (2020): 12, https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2020.1800612.
[17] Ekström, Bülow, and Wilinska, 'I Don't Think You Will Understand Me Because Really, I Believe', 733.
[18] See Marcus Herz, '"Then We Offer Them a New Project": The Production of Projects in Social Work Conducted by Civil Society in Sweden,' *Journal of Civil Society* 12, no. 4 (2016): 365-79, https://doi.org/10.1080/17448689.2016.1232782.
[19] Anna Meeuwisse and Sune Sunesson, 'Frivilliga organisationer, socialt arbete och expertis,' *Socialvetenskaplig Tidskrift* 5, no. 2-3 (1998): 175, my translation, https://doi.org/10.3384/SVT.1998.5.2-3.2923.

In the context of a withdrawal of the welfare state, other actors are increasing in salience, and some of these are religious. According to Cnaan, religious social work played an immense role in early social work but came to be downplayed, actually and rhetorically, due to a scientification and secularisation of social work by which 'social work […] gradually divorced itself from its religious roots'.[20] Since the 1980s however, at least in the USA, religious civil society has again come to take a more prominent position. Cnaan provides a range of examples of how religious organisations and philanthropic work have become vital providers of social services through work with homelessness, migration, ethnic minorities, empowerment for women, to name a few.[21] Cnaan suggests that the eroding of welfare provision in America from the 1980s onwards has transformed the landscape so that responsibilities for issues such as poverty are gradually transferred onto private and non-profit sectors.[22] Against this backdrop, religious-based social services are 'mushrooming' because the 'desire of believers, regardless of creed, to affirm their beliefs by service to others has assumed special significance in the era of devolution'.[23] This re-evaluation of the religious in social work that Cnaan wants to acknowledge is, according to my theoretical framework, a sign of the fact that religion is increasingly visible in social work.

Clarke proposes that the previous ambivalence when it comes to interactions between official and public institutions vis-à-vis faith-based organisations, an ambivalence that draws its sustenance and legitimacy from the legal separation of the church and the state,[24] is beginning to erode. Clarke says that when it comes to donor agencies and practices, there is a 'gradual movement from estrangement to engagement' by which faith-based organisations 'have actively sought dialogue with donor agencies, while donors have reciprocated'.[25] Clarke further notes however that encounters between actors often are shaped through secularist lenses. For FBOs to become better involved, secularist biases need to be overcome.

As related to this trend, Johan Gärde *inter alia* suggests that religious congregations and faith-based organisations often collaborate with each other, and with public agencies when it comes to welfare provision, at least in the postsecular context of Sweden. The introduction of New Public Management in Sweden and the subsequent

[20] Ram Cnaan, Robert Wineburg and Stephanie Boddie, *The Newer Deal: Social Work and Religion in Partnership* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 69.
[21] Cnaan, Wineburg and Boddie, *The Newer Deal*, chapter 8 and 9.
[22] Cnaan, Wineburg and Boddie, *The Newer Deal*, 279.
[23] Cnaan, Wineburg and Boddie, *The Newer Deal*, 302.
[24] Gerard Clarke, 'Agents of Transformation? Donors, Faith-Based Organisations and International Development,' *Third World Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (2007): 79, https://doi.org/10.1080/01436590601081880.
[25] Ibid.

privatisation of some aspects of welfare has spurred new constellations between different actors, amongst them interactions between religious civil society and public agencies. Thus, despite having fewer members, some religious congregations are active and innovative when it comes to interreligious and social work. Gärde even suggests that these conditions entail forms of 'resacralisation' in the sense that 'even secular organizations are emphasizing the need for a more holistic approach'.[26] FBOs similarly need to adapt to this new environment in terms of new strategies and leadership.

As a way to sum up the trend, Bowpitt succinctly says that trends of privatisation and marketisation has opened up the market and allowed other, independent actors to enter the scene, and he particularly mentions Christian organisations.[27] We are witnessing a 'rediscovery' of work with Christian foundations, he says (and I believe that the same can be said about other religious traditions and their social work as well). Bowpitt suggests further that the social work profession has paid little regard to its Christian predecessors, and he proposes a Christian approach to social work (the approach itself is of less relevance to my argument here).

From these changes, it is thus reasonable to speak of an increased visibility of religion in social work. Religiously motivated social work now complements secular social work, even to the point of being 'partners' or working together on certain issues. Not only are religion and spirituality highlighted in regard to specific social problems understood as emanating from religious worldviews (e.g., honour-related violence or violent extremism), but religion is also acknowledged as a positive force in work with *any* clients, for example, when used as a motivation for drug treatment etc.[28] It is increasingly realised, according to Furness and Gilligan at least, that religion often plays an immense role in how people 'interpret events, resolve dilemmas, make decisions and view themselves' and that 'social workers will only be competent to engage with people if they, also, engage with these important aspects of many individual's lives'.[29] The term *spirituality* is central to this broader understanding of religion as part of a holistic approach to social problems.

Social work is not the only discipline to have been affected by this trend. In a book on spirituality and its ability to solidify capitalism (a book that is very critical of this

[26] Johan Gärde, 'Shrinking Religious Communities and Thriving Interreligious Social Work in Sweden,' *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought* 34, no. 1 (2015): 20, https://doi.org/10.1080/15426432.2014.921129.
[27] Graham Bowpitt, 'Working with Creative Creatures: Towards a Christian Paradigm for Social Work Theory, with Some Practical Implications,' *British Journal of Social Work* 30, no. 3 (2000): 351, https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/30.3.349.
[28] Holly K. Oxhandler and Kenneth I. Pargament, 'Social work practitioners' integration of clients' religion and spirituality in practice: A literature review,' *Social Work* 59, no. 3 (Jul 2014): 271–9, https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/swu018.
[29] Sheila Furness and Philip Gilligan, *Religion, Belief and Social Work: Making a Difference* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2010), 1.

trend), Carrette and King suggest that spiritual techniques are being used for a variety of purposes, and are now introduced 'into educational curricula, bereavement and addiction counselling, psychotherapy and nursing',[30] all of which are closely related to social work agendas. This trend indicates that spiritual and religious practices are increasingly endorsed by practitioners in social work and related professions, and not only in relation to specifically 'religious problems'.

This turn towards religious actors and practices further motivates theoretical work on religion in social work. A final sign of how religion has become more relevant and visible in social work relates to academic discussion of the history of social work. Granted that the term *post-secular* principally points to a problematisation or reworking of the secularisation narrative, one could state that social work is becoming increasingly post-secular. There is now an ever-growing questioning of the previously taken-for-granted secularisation narrative in the theoretical field of social work. Religious philanthropy was in the past said to have been superseded by secular, scientific social work. As Vanderwoerd says, 'the story of the social work profession and its history has been told by those who either intentionally or unconsciously have accepted the dominant secularization story of the social sciences'.[31] Bowpit even claims that 'Christianity has been like the family silver, an acknowledged but rarely examined major premise of the Anglo-American social work tradition'.[32]

Against the secularisation narrative, it has been argued that the relation between professional social work and religious social work conducted by civil society is more complex. Although it is correct that religious philanthropy played a vital role in early social work, this does not mean that it ceased to do so after the emergence of scientifically-based or welfare-organised social work. Vanderwoerd argues that some of the actors lobbying for a professional social work were religious and had theological motifs for their engagement, although the religiosity of these actors is often neglected in retrospect.[33] According to Anna-Karin Kollind, many of the women engaged in the professionalisation of social work in Sweden were also motivated by theological convictions and religious beliefs, often combining their interest in working with the poor and the less fortunate with an interest in cultivating Christian beliefs.[34] These women played a role in the professionalisation of social work, for instance by

[30] Jeremy Carrette and Richard King, *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion* (London: Routledge, 2005), 1.
[31] James R. Vanderwoerd, 'Reconsidering Secularization and Recovering Christianity in Social Work History', *Social Work & Christianity* 38, no. 3 (2011): 250; See also Cnaan, Wineburg and Boddie, *The Newer Deal*, chapter 3.
[32] Graham Bowpitt, 'Evangelical Christianity, Secular Humanism, and the Genesis of British Social Work,' *The British Journal of Social Work* 28, no. 5 (1998): 676, https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordjournals.bjsw.a011385.
[33] Vanderwoerd, 'Reconsidering Secularization and Recovering Christianity in Social Work History'.
[34] Anna-Karin Kollind, 'Kvinnor och socialt arbete – vid övergången från filantropi till profession', *Socialvetenskaplig Tidskrift* 10, no. 2-3 (2003): 172–192, https://doi.org/10.3384/SVT.2003.10.2-3.2660.

establishing the first counselling practices.[35] In these accounts, a straightforward narrative of secularisation becomes highly problematic.

So, what do I mean when I say that social work is part of a trend of post-secularisation? The term is proposed by Jürgen Habermas, described almost as a new epoch in which the religious has returned.[36,37] Alluding to the works of Ola Sigurdson and Hans Joas, I would argue that the post-secular turn in social work is not so much an epoch as an epistemic change in which the secularisation narrative, held by most of the fathers of sociology,[38] is abandoned. That is to say, the post-secular is constituted by a reworking of a secular self-image. Social work, as we have seen, is part of this trend in that religion is contemplated, worked with and integrated into practice and theory, to the point where even the history of the field is reconsidered and re-evaluated.[39] If social work is to take the growing importance and visibility of religion in a myriad of ways seriously, the conceptual schemas and terms available to us, both in research and in practice, need to be expanded, contemplated and theoretically discussed.

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[35] See discussion on Emilia Fogelklou in Anna-Karin Kollind, *Äktenskap, konflikter och rådgivning: Från medling till samtalsterapi* (Stockholm: Carlsson, 2002), Chapter 1.

[36] See Habermas, 'Notes on a Post-Secular Society'

[37] The term *post-secular* has also been used more pejoratively by some philosophers and theologians. An early formulation of the term is given by Philip Blond, who suggests that the theological move of univocity that launched modernity (see chapter 5) has made theology idolatrous. Blond argues for a superseding of post-secular theology, and with blatant indignation proclaims that 'if it was the desire to give an account of […] materiality before giving an account of God that initiated the whole despicable idolatry of the modern, then it is only an account of matter's absolute and utter dependence upon God that can overcome the dreadful vacuity and despair that this age has fallen into' (Philip Blond, *Post-Secular Philosophy: Between Philosophy and Theology* (London: Routledge, 1998), 54-55.). Another critique of post-secularism is given by Slavoj Žižek, who says that post-secular philosophers such as (in Žižek´s reading) Jacques Derrida and Emmanuel Levinas represent a deprivation of all that is good with religion. In Žižek's opinion, religion holds the ability to produce constructive conflict. But by reducing the religious to spirituality, harmonious with a decadent and capitalist lifestyle, religion can no longer produce conflict or expose injustices since it becomes harmonious to capitalism and any form of life (See Slavoj Žižek, *Did somebody say totalitarianism? Five interventions in the (mis)use of a notion* (London/New York: Verso, 2001), Chapter 4.).

[38] Cf. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parson (1930, Reprint: London/New York: Routledge, 1992), 115; Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Carol Cosman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). For a critique of their sociological understanding of religion, see John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006).

[39] See Vanderwoerd, 'Reconsidering Secularization and Recovering Christianity in Social Work History'; Bowpitt, 'Working with Creative Creatures: Towards a Christian Paradigm for Social Work Theory, with Some Practical Implications.'

Purpose of the Dissertation

Given the new visibility of religion in social work described above, there is an urgent need to grapple with and attempt to comprehend this so-called post-secular turn, as well as its implications, potential downsides, and potential benefits. This dissertation begins its theoretical work on the post-secular turn in social work through an analysis of the work being done to prevent extremism and promote democracy in Sweden. I analyse parts of this Swedish work, which intensified during the boom of people joining radical Islamic movements. Within that context, social work is increasingly identified in public discourse as a potentially contributing actor. I set out to describe how actors within social work and related professions make sense of, talk about and work with religion in their endeavours to manage and broadly prevent extremism and to promote democracy, human rights, and tolerance. The case provides me with a rich empirical example of how religion is being addressed within social work and related disciplines, as it is one of the more salient ways of how religion is being reintroduced or made more visible in social work.

But this dissertation is not merely descriptive and is not limited to showing how religion is construed in the material. It is also a theoretically developing study that sets out to conduct theoretical work on how religion can and should be worked with, conceptualised, and intervened in within social work. The empirical case is chosen because it is emblematic in the way it actualises a concern with religion in social work. Moreover, the work to prevent extremism and promote democracy entails key formulations of religion and its nature that may potentially guide other forms of social work and discourses on social problem.

The purpose is thus not merely to conduct empirical analysis but to provide critical and constructive reflection. The critical operation undertaken in this dissertation is to denaturalise and question certain assumptions and preconceptions related to religion. By linking specific practices and ways of talking about religion to the history of Western modernity and secularism, this dissertation is hopefully able to show how that which seems natural and self-evident in the material could, in fact, have been otherwise. From these insights, I set out to theoretically develop an approach to religion in social work. This dissertation is thus at once descriptive, critical, and constructive:

The purpose of this dissertation is to describe and critically examine how practitioners working to prevent extremism and promote democracy conceptualise, make sense of, and intervene in religion in their work. On the basis of genealogical and historical analysis, the purpose is further to propose a constructive and productive

alternative for how religion can be conceptualised, made sense of, and be intervened in within social work.

Method and Empirical Material

The emphasis in this study is on critical reflection and theory development. This study sets out to develop theoretical ideas concerning how religion can be understood and worked with within social work. Yet despite its theoretical scope, empirical material has guided the process. Interview material has guided me towards specific themes and ways of conceptualising religion, which are further reflected upon and critically analysed genealogically. However, and this deserves to be repeated, data does not take centre stage in this dissertation. I present only a small fraction of the interview material. In other words, the empirical material is illustrative rather than representative. In this section, I present a concise account of my empirical material and how it has been collected, and I conclude with a few methodological reflections.

The case investigated empirically in this dissertation is long-term preventative work against radicalisation and extremism, often by promoting democracy, tolerance, human rights, and dialogue between groups. The issue of extremism and radicalisation was widely debated in Sweden after 9/11, but intensified greatly in 2012–2016 when more than 300 individuals travelled to Syria and Iraq to join ISIS.[40] During this period, a National Coordinator against Violent Extremism was appointed to oversee the work and gather knowledge on the subject. Work to prevent radicalisation and extremism has become interlinked with broader work on risk and vulnerability,[41] which means that actors traditionally not working with issues of terrorism such as teachers, youth leaders and, for that matter, social workers are increasingly involved in preventative work against terrorism and extremism.[42] Religion has been frequently discussed and intervened upon within these new practices, largely due to the way so-called Islamic or jihadist radicalisation has been understood, partially at least, as a religious issue.[43]

The empirical material of this study is comprised of interviews with actors and practitioners who have come to work preventatively with issues of extremism and

[40] Säkerhetspolisen, *Årsbok* (Stockholm, 2020), 54.
[41] For example, Örebro kommun, 'Risk- och sårbarhetsanalys för Örebro kommun. 2020–2023' (KS 1157/2019) (Örebro kommun, 2019); Orust kommun. 'Risk- och sårbarhetsanalys 2019 Orust kommun' (KS/2019:97) (Orust kommun, 2019),14.
[42] Christer Mattsson, 'Extremisten i klassrummet - perspektiv på skolans förväntade ansvar att förhindra framtida terrorism' (PhD diss., Göteborgs Universitet, 2018); Håvard Haugstvedt, 'Trusting the Mistrusted: Norwegian Social Workers Strategies in Preventing Radicalization and Violent Extremism,' *Journal for Deradicalization*, no. 19 (2019): 149-84.
[43] See Magnus Hörnqvist and Janne Flyghed, 'Exclusion or Culture? The Rise and the Ambiguity of the Radicalisation Debate,' *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 5, no. 3 (2012): 319–34, https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2012.717788; Leandro Schclarek Mulinari, 'The Spectrum of Repression: Swedish Muslims' Experiences of Anti-terrorism Measures', *Critical Criminology* 27, no. 3 (2019): 451–456, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10612-019-09462-8.

radicalisation, and also partly with religion. When deciding on what umbrella term to use, I have been reluctant to call these practices counter-terrorism or counter-extremism, since that would lead my readers into thinking that the work analysed here is police work or security work such as locating and defusing terrorism threats. Very few, if any, of those interviewed for this study can be said to do that. Rather, their work is often quite broad and is concerned not merely with extremism but also with polarisation, stereotypes, racism and social problems, and may include work to foster tolerance, democracy, human rights and gender equality. They engage in dialogue projects, interreligious work, work with young people in the suburbs, and discussions about democracy and rights. These projects and practices are supposed to have various positive ripple effects in a community. They are as much about building sustainable communities as they are about preventing radicalisation. In fact, many of the interviewees are reluctant to become 'soft cops' or underlings to the security services as they see their own expertise as an important complement to other work. Extremism is thus, at least for some of those interviewed, merely one aspect amongst many. The umbrella term I have chosen to describe their practices is *work to prevent extremism and promote democracy*. When I refer to this work later in the analysis, it is these very broad and often quite long-term projects and practices of developing social sustainability, tolerance, dialogue, human rights, and democracy that I refer to.[44]

The data for this study was collected during 2018–2019. The empirical material consists of qualitative, semi-structured interviews[45] with twenty interviewees. All of them have been engaged in work to prevent extremism and promote democracy, albeit in different and multiple ways. Of these twenty, twelve are practitioners, one is a politician, and the rest are experts in related academic fields (e.g., terrorism studies or Islamic studies). Some of the interviewees work within civil society, whereas others are employed within the institutions of the welfare state or by local social service agencies. The experts I have interviewed were chosen not specifically because of their academic/scientific work but because they had been engaged in practical work or had been consultants or were involved as experts in practitioner's work.

The length of the interviews varied from 45 minutes to 2 hours, most of them being approximately 90 minutes long. Twelve of the interviews were conducted face-to-face, the rest via telephone. Of the face-to-face interviews, two were conducted in a 'neutral' environment (cafés), one was conducted at my office, and the remainder at the participant's offices or in their homes. The location of the interviews was chosen

[44] Democracy has been of vital importance in the Swedish approach to violent extremism, often by depicting extremism as a threat to democracy. Thus, working to promote democracy is often considered beneficial for preventing extremism.
[45] See Alan Bryman, *Samhällsvetenskapliga metoder*, uppl. 2, trans. Björn Nilsson (Malmö: Liber, 2011), chapter 17.

by the interviewees. Interviews were transcribed[46] and analysed according to a thematic, theoretical design (see later in this section). The interviews were semi-structured and in-depth. The themes were structured according to the theoretical orientation of the study, while allowing for flexibility and the ability to follow the pace of the interviewees.[47] The empirical study was approved by an ethics board, and all of the interviewees were informed about the topic of the research and reminded that their participation was voluntary, meaning that they could abort their participation at any time during the interview without undue pressure from the researcher.[48] I have also anonymised the quotations by contextualising them in such a way that it is impossible to identify the interviewees.[49] All quoted participants were given the opportunity to read the quotations and comment on them, which a few chose to do. None of them had any objections to the quotations, although one asked me to reformulate a quotation in order to make a point more clearly.

The interviews were motivated by the theoretical orientation of the study and were organised into five themes, but the themes were not slavishly followed. The *first theme* involved discussion of how the interviewee came to be involved in working to prevent extremism and promote democracy, how these issues were identified, and how work on extremism relates to the interviewee's other tasks. The *second theme* was about social practice: what is being done, how does it work, what is problematic, stories about when things have gone well/not so well, what the most difficult aspects of the work are, potential difficulties in reaching their target group, the reactions of others to their work (e.g., media critique, critique or credit from researchers or the public.). A *third theme* revolved specifically around the phenomena of violent extremism and radicalisation. We discussed extremism and how the interviewee conceptualises it in their work. We also discussed the interviewee's personal views on the phenomenon: whether it is new, what aspects of it are new, what the causes are, what distinguishes it from other problems the interviewee works with, and so forth. The *fourth theme* is the one that was most clearly theoretically motivated and concerns the issue of religion. It deals with the relation between religion and violent extremism, and also with how religion can be conceptualised. Are there differences between secular and religious extremism, in what ways religion can be worked with, whether religion is or is

[46] In a few cases I used the RITA method (rapid identification of themes from audio recordings), which means that I listened to the interviews. Using this method enabled me to omit sections of the interviews that were irrelevant to the analysis and the purpose of the study. See Jennifer Watling Neal, Zachary P. Neal, Erika VanDyke and Mariah Kornbluh, 'Expediting the Analysis of Qualitative Data in Evaluation: A Procedure for the Rapid Identification of Themes From Audio Recordings (RITA),' *American Journal of Evaluation* 36, no. 1 (2015): 118–32, https://doi.org/10.1177/1098214014536601.

[47] For example, Steinar Kvale and Svend Brinkmann, *Den kvalitativa forskningsintervjun* (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2014).

[48] 2017/999.

[49] See Vetenskapsrådet, 'Good Research Practice' (Stockholm: Swedish Research Council, 2017), 41.

not a positive force when it comes to social cohesion, community development and prevention of social problems. Finally, the *fifth theme* is about collaboration between various actors. It was organised around issues such as what actors the interviewee works with, actors identified as having something to contribute, and who practitioners call when in need of advice concerning their practices. It also included eventual insights and knowledge that have arisen from these collaborations, the different roles actors have in collaboration, eventual impediments to collaboration, and examples of good collaboration. If the interviewee worked with religious congregations, the role these religious representatives were given was specifically followed up and discussed.

At this point, it is important to briefly elaborate on the position related to the theory of science that I have worked with in this dissertation. When working theoretically and genealogically with interview material, I believe it is fruitful to adopt a non-realist position, be it constructivist or otherwise. In the research conducted here, empirical material has less the status of evidence and more the status of a point of departure for critical reflection. I am predominantly influenced by the work of Mats Alvesson with various co-authors in this regard.[50] Epistemologically, it is assumed that there is no pure data: the researcher looks for certain patterns within a vast surplus of impressions, and these patterns are never theoretically neutral. There is thus no data without theory.

I have thus adopted, in its most general form, a constructivist view on data collection in terms of which data is seen as *produced* rather than discovered. This further means that data never authoritatively point in one direction. As Alvesson and Sköldberg eloquently put it, 'data never come in the shape of pure drops from an original virgin source; they are always merged with theory at the very moment of genesis.'[51] Theory and data are inextricably linked in the sense that theory creates order and chaos in a constant bombardment of sensory experiences. Thus, 'Rather than assuming that "data", like a signpost, point in a specific direction, "data" read as empirical material make a variety of readings possible'.[52] Since data never points in an authoritative manner, I have allowed the empirical material to point me in a specific direction which, in my view, could beneficially be elaborated theoretically. I have thus chosen my themes and the interpretation of the material in relation to theoretical ideas, fully aware of the fact that other interpretations were available.

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[50] Mats Alvesson and Kaj Sköldberg, *Reflexive Methodology: New Vistas for Qualitative Research,* 2nd ed. (Los Angeles/London: Sage Publications, 2009); Mats Alvesson and Dan Kärreman, *Qualitative Research and Theory Development: Mystery as Method* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2011); Mats Alvesson, Yiannis Gabriel and Roland Paulsen, *Return to Meaning: A Social Science with Something to Say* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

[51] Alvesson and Sköldberg, *Reflexive Methodology*, 58.

[52] Alvesson and Kärreman, *Qualitative Research and Theory Development*, 5.

Genealogical Analysis

The empirical material is analysed in accordance with a Foucauldian and genealogically inspired discourse analysis. A Foucauldian discourse analysis begins with a political and critical intent by recognizing that language is constituted by power relations and inequalities.[53] Language, in this view, is not a neutral medium but imposes certain constraints on us, while enabling and producing certain forms of agency and subjectivities. Discourses thus conceived constrain social life and construct specific objects: 'entities or processes which acquire an objective status through the use of particular vocabularies'.[54] Discourses thus constitute our thought and our ability to act, albeit never in a totally fixed way. In addition to being constraining, discourses further enable action by producing subjectivities as well as forms of resistance and agency that are immanent to the discourse itself. It deserves to be clarified, however, that a discourse analytical or genealogical approach does not assume that a discourse is simply talk, conversation and language, the words uttered by the subject. Tacit assumptions and practices constitute the discursive formation or the discursive horizon, which means that discourses are concrete, even material. According to Foucault, a discourse 'is not a consciousness that embodies its project in the external form of language (*langage*); it is not a language (*langue*), plus a subject to speak it. It is a practice that has its own forms of sequence and succession.'[55] Or differently, discourses are 'socially produced forms of knowledge that set limits upon what it is possible to think, write or speak about a "given social object or practice"'.[56] It follows that to analyse a discourse is to analyse what makes a specific statement or a particular practice meaningful and possible in the first place. This is done by analysing the underlying assumptions, ontologies and epistemologies of a specific way of talking about and operating in the world.

In this dissertation, I do not set out to analyse a whole discursive formation, such as the discourse on violent extremism or radicalisation. The empirical analysis is more limited in scope. I have analysed how practitioners make sense of, talk about and work with religion, and thereby how religious subjectivities are formed and produced within practice. I have studied 'the limits of what can be said and done, and the means by

[53] Robin Wooffitt, *Conversation Analysis and Discourse Analysis: A Comparative and Critical Introduction* (London: Sage, 2005), 146.
[54] Wooffitt, *Conversation Analysis and Discourse Analysis*, 148.
[55] Foucault cited in Carol Bacchi and Susan Goodwin, *Poststructural Policy Analysis: A Guide to Practice* (New York: Palgrave Pivot, 2016), 35.
[56] Bacchi and Goodwin, *Poststructural Policy Analysis*, 35.

which discourse makes particular statements seem rational and beyond all doubt, even though they are only valid at a certain time and place'.[57]

Practices and the uttered statements about them are analysed in order to understand how the discourse thus analysed constrains and produces meaning. A broad but guiding question for me has been: what becomes sayable, what becomes doable, in relation to religion in the work studied here? The material was organised into groups or themes that later came to serve as chapters in the dissertation. I identified four themes in total. The *first* is related to doctrines and teachings in religion; the *second* to inner beliefs and motifs in relation to religion and ideology; the *third* theme relates to freedom and rules; and the *fourth* theme is related to dialogue. The themes were identified by organising the data according to how religion and ideology as a phenomenon was being produced and constructed in practice. Guiding questions in organising the material were: how do the interviewees talk about religion, how do they work with religion, what practices are brought together, and how does that constitute the phenomenon? I have worked with the assumption that certain practices produce a certain notion of what it means to be religious: a specific use of religious dialogue, a specific way of analysing religious practice, a specific way of talking to religious citizens, ways to describe clients in the interviews, certain strategies in combatting problems (seen as) related to religion – these practices and utterances all constitute religion as an object of knowledge and intervention.

From this initial categorisation and organisation of the material, I was able to work out specific themes. But it was not until I dug deeper into theory that the implications of the categorisations emerged and became visible to me. By drawing on theoretical work, I was able to clarify and sharpen the analytical categories, although they remained clearly grounded in the interview material. This means that all of the four themes, although derived from the material, were developed in relation to theory (*abduction*). As an illustrative example of the abductive process undertaken here, I had categorised parts of the material that described a very personal, private vision of the religious. Practitioners talked about and worked with religion in ways that produced a vision of the religious as something emotional, something inner. But it was when consulting Charles Taylor's work that I first realised that this way of working with religion is linked to authenticity and a spiritualist turn in modernity, and also, more deeply, to a specific form of human subjectivity (what Taylor terms the *buffered self*).

[57] Siegfried Jäger and Florentine Maier, 'Theoretical and Methodological aspects of Foucauldian Critical Discourse Analysis and Dispositive Analysis,' in *Methods for Critical Discourse Analysis*, ed. Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer (New York/London: Sage, 2009), 36.

The themes are thus derived from the interview material, but they are also motivated and clarified by theory.

The analysis of the interview material has not, however, been an end in itself. As mentioned above, the emphasis in this dissertation is on critical and constructive analysis. I have approached this through *genealogy*, with a broad and loose definition of the term. Before describing my procedure, it might be worth pointing out that I am not endorsing a programmatic version of genealogy á la Nietzsche[58] or Foucault, although I have been influenced and inspired by them both. That being said, the procedure undertaken here can broadly be described as the following: taken-for-granted assumptions and ideas concerning religion that were identified in the interview material are genealogically investigated through the use of literature on theological and philosophical history.[59] Literature and historical sources produce distance between the researcher and the present, as it were, thereby allowing me to see that that which seems inevitable, natural, can in fact be quite controversial in a specific historical moment. In a genealogical vein, I hold that the route towards the present is anything but a straight line. As Foucault puts it: 'The search for descent is not the erecting of foundations: on the contrary, it disturbs what was previously thought immobile; it fragments what was thought unified; its shows the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent with itself.'[60] The point of such an investigation into the discontinuities of the past is different than in traditional historical research. For Foucault, genealogy is a way to rethink the present, not to understand history by contemporary means.

Genealogy thus has a critical function for Foucault in that by tracing 'the erratic and discontinuous process whereby the past became the present', that is to say, by showing the contingency of that which is seen as natural, it provides us with an *openness to the future*.[61] Genealogy 'does not pretend to go back in time to restore an unbroken continuity' or to show us that 'the past actively exists in the present.'[62] On the contrary, it offers a realisation that the present could have been otherwise, that

[58] Most clearly in his investigation into our categories of good and evil. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Om moralens härstammning: En stridsskrift* [Zur Genealogie der Moral. Eine Streitschrift], trans. Jan Sjögren (Stockholm: Modernista, 2019).
[59] I have principally worked with secondary sources here, that is, scholarly work that investigates the emergence of secular societies in the West, often focusing on analyses of philosophical and theological thought. I have, however, in a few cases worked directly with original sources. For instance, I have read work from Aristotle, Augustine, John Duns Scotus, Thomas Aquinas, John Locke, G. W. F. Hegel, and several others. Nevertheless, since I am neither a philosopher nor a theologian, as well as being constrained by time since much of my work has been directed at analysing empirical material and reading scholarly literature related to social work and extremism, it has been absolutely crucial to work with secondary literature.
[60] Foucault cited in David Garland, 'What Is a "History of the Present"? on Foucault's Genealogies and Their Critical Preconditions,' *Punishment & Society* 16, no. 4 (2014): 372, https://doi.org/10.1177/1462474514541711.
[61] Garland, 'What Is a ''History of the Present",' 372.
[62] Michel Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,' in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 81.

another path could have been followed[63] by showing us that truth is founded upon 'the exteriority of accidents,' as Foucault puts it.[64] This insight functions as an opening, a way to rewrite the present and find alternative, hopefully better or more productive ways to formulate our pressing concerns.

A genealogical investigation, an attempt to write the history of the present, does not have to be a destructive or relativist endeavour. As David Garland points out, genealogy is 'dependent […] upon a prior, critical account that establishes the problem to be explained and points the way to its most likely solutions'.[65] That is to say, genealogy can be a way to develop and rethink some of the issues and problems of the contemporary era, not necessarily to annihilate the values and ideas of our time. Genealogy can thus be said to be problem- and solution-oriented as it provides us with a possibility to rethink that which is taken for granted. Hans Joas opts for what he terms an *affirmative* genealogy, a genealogy that is influenced by Nietzsche but which, unlike Nietzsche, does not attempt to remove the scales from our eyes to make us see the illusory nature of our proclaimed gods and idols.[66] Influenced by Ernst Troeltsch, Joas writes: 'gaining a historically grounded understanding of the present helps solve contemporary orientational problems'.[67] Following Joas, I have operated with the idea that if we were aware of our origins and of the many controversies and ruptures that have led us to where we are now, we would be in a better position to re-evaluate and rethink the present, which does not mean abandoning the present. When it comes to the concept of religion that is identified in the interview material, a concept that is ingrained with Christian and Western connotations and norms, an investigation into its historical roots can allow us to find new paths, new ways to conceptualise the religious. In a post-secular and, more importantly, multicultural and multireligious setting, diverting from a fundamentally Christian (or Protestant) and modern concept of religion is of the essence.

It is exactly such an approach to literature on theological and philosophical history that I have adhered to in this dissertation. When I dig into the history, I do this to denaturalise that which seems natural, inevitable.

I shall now describe this process more concretely. The first theme that was identified was related to doctrines, teachings and official statements and their function in religion. Broadly speaking, I noticed that practitioners worked with and talked about

[63] Bacchi and Goodwin, *Poststructural Policy Analysis*, 46.
[64] Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', 81.
[65] Garland, 'What Is a "History of the Present"', 379.
[66] Hans Joas, *The Sacredness of the Person: A New Genealogy of Human Rights*, trans. Alex Skinner (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013), 3.
[67] Joas, *The Sacredness of the Person*, 124.

the intellectual or cognitive content of religion. I linked these statements and practices (as described by the interviewees) to Talal Asad's work and his argument that religion in a modern/secular world is often defined as a set of propositions or a system of doctrines. In order to denaturalise this view by which religion is reduced to or becomes synonymous with its doctrines and official elements, that is, to undo the links between theory and practice or intellect and body, I drew on literature on theological and philosophical history that shows how this view of religion as doctrines is bound up with a scientific outlook and with comparative religion as a field of science. Religion thereby became an umbrella term for a wide range of practices and behaviours that were identified principally with a very specific truth content, influenced by how truth is conceived of in research science.

From the accounts of the complex history of how religion came to be viewed as doctrines and with the realisation that such a view is by no means natural and could easily have developed otherwise, I ventured further into developing an alternative. I find an alternative way to understand doctrines in the American theologian George Lindbeck and his plea for a post-liberal theology, a view that accepts doctrines as potentially playing a central role in religion albeit in a slightly different manner: not so much as bound to its truth content as being a kind of language or grammar, a way to make sense of the world.

The second theme identified in the interview material is related to how religion and ideology (in this case, democracy) were being linked to and explained as inner motives, emotions, and personal responsibility. In the interpretation of the material, I drew links between this understanding of religion and what has been termed a spiritualistic, privatised, and authentic age of religion. I investigated the idea of religion as deriving from the inner core of the person genealogically, via the works of Charles Taylor, William Desmond and Slavoj Žižek, amongst others. It became clear that inwardness is not a metaphysical or anthropological constant. Certain specific developments such as Cartesian subject philosophy, ideals of civility and ideals of authenticity (for instance, in German romanticism) paved the way for a view of the religious as being derived from our innermost wants and wishes. From this genealogical investigation, I elaborated on a view of the human subject as radically empty, in contrast to a Cartesian encased core (the cogito) and developed further a vision of religion as being grounded not in individual desires but in liturgy and practice that does not necessitate an inner base at all.

The third theme identified in the interview material was related to rule following and freedom in how practitioners talk about extremism as linked to fatalism, as well as in how practitioners claim that religion is not about authority and following rules.

To demystify these ideas and conceptions about freedom vis-à-vis religion, I explored controversies in the Western theological history related to freedom; that is, what is usually referred to as the problem of universals, as well as the debate on freedom between Martin Luther and Erasmus of Rotterdam. In both controversies it becomes clear that freedom in the form of freedom of choice, which is how freedom is portrayed in the interview material (according to my reading), is neither inevitable nor self-evident. In fact, it represents very specific views about subjectivity and about the will. After having investigated the history of modern freedom, I worked out an alternative by drawing on philosophies that consider rules, norms and even scriptures to embody and enable a kind of freedom, albeit of a slightly different kind.

The final theme of this dissertation is related to dialogue. Within this theme, religion is linked to certain forms of 'problems' such as gender inequality or violence. I investigate these assumptions about the nature or essence of religion (e.g. religion as potentially violent or misogynist) through research that investigates the relations between religion and secularism vis-à-vis topics such as gender equality, human rights, and violence. A common thread in the literature that I have investigated and had as a 'sparring partner' in the genealogical investigation is that secularism was not a prerequisite for gender equality or for a supposedly more peaceful existence. The implications and conclusions I draw from the literature consulted here is that religious language may well have a potentially contributory and productive function in social work in the form of religious dialogue and work with religious citizens.

Now that I have clarified how I have gathered, selected, and analysed the material in this study, let me describe, in broad contours, the theoretical framework of the study.

Terminology: The Secular, Secularisation and Secularism

Genealogies and discourse analyses are often strongly grounded in theory,[68] theories which become ways to organise and frame the study. To make sense of the material and be able to draw out theoretical implications from it, I have drawn on theories that explicate the premises of religion in the modern age or, more broadly, theories on *secularism*. Secularism has had the function of an orientating concept in this study, used to 'give direction and guidance'[69] to the analysis. It is suggested that many of the

[68] Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer, 'Critical Discourse Analysis: History, Agenda, Theory and Methodology,' in *Methods for Critical Discourse Analysis*, ed. Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer (New York/London: Sage, 2009), 23–27.
[69] Derek Layder, *Sociological Practice: Linking Theory and Social Research* (London: Sage Publications, 1998), 103.

ways that religion is conceptualised by practitioners can be summarised, conceptualised, and analysed as forms of secularistic rhetoric. In this section, I clarify what I mean by secularistic theories of religion.

Before elaborating on what a secularist theory of religion is, it should be clarified for pedagogical purposes that secularism is not the same as the *secular*, nor, for that matter, as the process of *secularisation*, despite similar connotations. To avoid confusion, the terms 'secular' and 'secularisation' are described here. Neither of these terms is new. In fact, they already had their place in medieval Catholicism. In Latin Christendom, the world was divided into two realms: Heaven and Earth. The earthly realm was itself divided into two domains; the religious, which was property and lands within the domain of the Church, and the *saeculum*, the world outside of the cloisters. All these realms and domains intersected in the sacrament, and the Church was the mediator between them.[70] The secular was thus not a realm outside the religious structure: it was an integral part of it. John Milbank remarks further that the secular had yet another meaning; it was a theological concept, referring to 'a time – the interval between fall and *eschaton* where coercive justice, private property and impaired natural reason must make shift to cope with the unredeemed effects of sinful humanity'.[71] In simpler jargon, the secular was an *era*, according to the Christian reckoning of time.[72] The secular thus had very different connotations from its contemporary meaning as a space emptied of religious fervour.

It was also within this medieval theological structure that the term *secularisation* was first used, which then meant a person leaving the cloister and became a 'secular' person, someone who was a member of the secular clergy rather than the religious (monastic) clergy. However, that did not mean that they had abandoned their faith. 'Secularization' was first used with reference to 'the massive expropriation and appropriation, usually by the state, of monasteries, landholdings and the mortmain wealth of the church after the Protestant Reformation and the ensuing religious wars'.[73] Secularisation thus had nothing to do with increasing faithlessness but with changes in the structure of society.

The term has gradually shifted in meaning, however, and now refers to the assumption that modernisation and rationalisation lead to the end of religion, an assumption shared by most of the founding fathers of social science (e.g., Weber, Marx, Durkheim

[70] Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, 12–17; Furani, "Is There a Postsecular?", 10–12.
[71] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 9.
[72] This meaning is still contained in words like the Swedish *sekel*, meaning a period of one hundred years, which is derived from *saeculum*.
[73] Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, 13.

and Parsons).[74] Broadly put, 'secularisation' is now the process by which something originally sacred or transcendent is transferred into or reformulated as something non-religious or immanent.[75] Max Weber's famous work on the capitalist spirit provides an elucidating and emblematic case of secularisation theory. In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber links capitalism to the Calvinist doctrine of predestination. Calvin, in Weber's reading, taught that hard work and ascetic ideals were the surest way of finding salvation, meaning that the Protestant ethos 'had the psychological effect of freeing the acquisition of goods from the inhibitions of traditionalistic ethics. It broke the bonds of the impulse of acquisition in that it not only legalized it, but […] looked upon it as directly willed by God.'[76] Greed suddenly had a theological incentive, so that it became morally righteous rather than, as before, an act of selfishness. However, since capitalism rests on a mechanical/immanent ground, the Calvinist ethos could be stripped of its metaphysical content: it was *secularised*.[77] The capitalist ethos thus originates in theology as something transcendent, but is freed of its theology and grafted onto secular/immanent ideals.

Let me now return to the term 'secularism' with which I began this discussion. Whereas 'secular' and 'secularisation' are old terms, albeit with slightly different connotations now, secularism is a more recent term. I find it vital to keep these terms separate. Not only is secularism a more recent term; it comes with specific connotations. Both the secular and secularisation can be used without ontologising religion, and they have been used both to describe the (alleged) end of religion in modernity and, equally, within a theological context. In other words, 'secular' and 'secularisation' have a function in both political theologies and in non-religious or immanent political structures. The same cannot be said about secularism, which is an ideology dedicated to *relegating* religion from the public and political domains of life. Within this ideology lurk theories of religion, ways of conceptualising religion that further motivate a purification of public matters from religious sentiments. By drawing on a

[74] Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, 17.

[75] Hans Blumenberg sharply critiques the use of the term 'secularisation'. He identifies a peculiar ambiguity in the term, which means alienation from the religious content while also presupposing that the new content is derived from the religious. The term thus presupposes a form of continuity, but paradoxically, also rupture and radical break. He identifies this lack of clarity in the works of Max Weber, Carl Schmitt and Karl Löwith, whom he maintains all portray secularisation in this manner. Blumenberg's main criticism of their accounts is that they confuse content with function. Although the modern world rests upon concepts that derive from a theological age, these have a radically different function in the modern age. Certain concepts become emptied of their content in the transition from one epoch to another, but the old concepts linger on, albeit with a radically different position and meaning. Blumenberg's term for how functions are transferred from one epoch to another is *functional reoccupation*, by which a seemingly transferred concept is assigned a totally different meaning. See Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (London/Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1985), 3–124.

[76] Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 115.

[77] Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 124.

discussion of secularism, one can see that theories of religion are neither politically nor metaphysically neutral: they are interwoven with political strivings. Secularism is an ideology that contains theories of religion, providing it with inclinations to relegate religion from the public sphere or to retrospectively explain why this has occurred. To clarify this, let me begin with a brief history of the term.

Secularism as an ideology was originally adopted in the middle of the nineteenth century by British freethinkers to avoid being condemned as atheists in a Christian society.[78] Secularist thought had existed since the Enlightenment, but in the middle of the nineteenth century, it became widely popular and took on a novel form as distinct from pantheism, religious rationalism and humanism: 'it was here that the constitutive "double protest" of anticlericalism and (increasingly) immanent worldview became the basis' for secularist movements.[79] The term was coined by the freethinker George Jacob Holyoke, for whom secularism 'is the study of promoting human welfare by material means'.[80] As understood by Holyoke, secularism is directed at those who

> find Theology indefinite, or inadequate, or deem it unreliable. It replaces theology, which mainly regards life as a sinful necessity, as a scene of tribulation through which we can pass to a better world. Secularism rejoices in this life.[81]

Secularism is thus a political project that aims at promoting welfare materialistically, disregarding any notions of the infinite. Holyoke places natural science at the centre of his morality, which is grounded on the laws of nature and guided by the scientific method. The reason for him to do so is that he sees a scientific approach to human welfare as superior to any theological approach. As Holyoke puts it: 'One physician will do more to alleviate human suffering than ten priests. One physical discovery will do more to advance civilization than a generation of prayer-makers'.[82] Secularism á la Holyoke is thus naturally antagonistic to religion, understood as inferior to a scientific worldview.

In Holyoke, any understanding of religion is intimately interwoven with his political strivings, an attempt to realise a radically materialist metaphysics (or *anti*-metaphysic). This, I suggest, is true of every form of secularism, which always dovetails theories of religion (its ontology) with an argument for religion's place in society

[78] Talal Asad, *The Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2003), 23.
[79] Todd Weir, *Secularism and Religion in Nineteenth-Century Germany: The Rise of the Fourth Confession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 6.
[80] George Jacob Holyoke, *The Principles of Secularism Illustrated* (Franklin Classics, 1871), 11.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Holyoke, *The Principles of Secularism Illustrated,* 29.

(its political (ir)relevance). I draw here on Casanova, who argues that secularism 'becomes an ideology the moment it entails a theory of what "religion" is or does'.[83] Casanova broadly divides secularism into two forms: philosophical-historical and political secularism. The former is analogous to the sociological assumption that modernisation leads to secularisation, in which religion is portrayed as being in conflict with scientific findings and, hence, as immature and replaceable with better forms of knowledge (science). The second form does not see religion as immature. It holds instead that religion contains a potential for morality, an 'ethical communitarian reservoir of human solidarity' as Casanova says.[84] But alas, religion is also potentially violent according to this view, meaning that religion should be relegated to the private sphere where it is harmless. Both these secularistic ideologies hold, as we can see, theories of the ontology of religion.

For Casanova, secularism entails a prescriptive element, a performative way of speaking of religion that is of relevance to my studies. Practitioners, in their attempts to understand religion, also prescribe particular delimitations or boundaries to religion, as we shall see. Talal Asad has similarly showed that a secularist theory of religion entails a proscribing element. In his genealogy of the term 'religion', he argues that anthropology, forged in the midst of colonial encounters, identified what anthropologists saw as a specific mode of symbolic behaviour 'conceived essentially in terms of signifying behaviour – a type of activity to be classified separately from practical, that is, technically effective, behaviour'.[85] What marks the modern, Western understanding of religion, which becomes an umbrella term for any religious or spiritual tradition, is that it has to do with the *symbolic* dimension of human practice, clearly distinguishable from other practices, be they economic, practical, erotic or whatever. Religion is nothing more than its symbolic expressions, according to the anthropologists of the colonial era. They thus expel religion from all other arenas of the world.

The conclusion to be drawn both from Asad's and Casanova's work is that the term 'religion', often seen as a neutral term that merely describes a specific phenomenon (religion), is itself part of an ideological project of hegemonizing a specific world order. This becomes even clearer in Cavanaugh's book on religious violence. Cavanaugh sees the modern term 'religion' as something rather alien to the Latin Roman term *Religio*, which meant knowledge concerning rituals and practices of both

[83] José Casanova, 'The Secular and Secularisms,' *Social Research* 76, no. 4 (2009): 1051, http://www.jstor.org/stable/40972201.
[84] Casanova, 'The Secular and Secularisms,' 1057.
[85] Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Disciplines and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore/London: John Hopkins University Press, 1993), 58.

worldly and transcendent character. *Religio* did not refer to the subject's conviction but to knowledge of *proper procedure*. Moreover, the term was exclusively used to denote *Christian* rituals. The modern universalization of religion emerged much later, as an effect of intense conflicts between the state and the churches in which the former gained the upper hand. As Cavanaugh puts it:

> The very claim that the boundaries between religion and nonreligion are natural, eternal, fixed, and immutable *is itself* a part of the new configuration of power that comes about with the rise of the modern state. The new state's claim to a monopoly on violence, lawmaking, and public allegiance within a given territory depends upon either the absorption of the church into the state or the relegation of the church to an essentially private realm. Key to this move is the contention that the church's business is religion. Religion must appear, therefore, not as what the church is left with once it has been stripped of earthly relevance, but as the timeless and essential human endeavor to which the church's pursuits should always have been confined.[86]

In strivings for a secular world order, the churches' domains were reformulated into dealing strictly with private matters. It is within this project of state hegemony in political affairs that the modern term 'religion' finds its home. By identifying religion with the pure and unpolluted relation between the individual believer and God, religion cannot contest state hegemony. Ergo, defining religion as inner piety is/was vital for securing the political claims of the state.

Yet another view on how the religious is defined in accordance with a political goal is given by Milbank in his genealogy of secular reason. For Milbank, secularism is underwritten by a specific metaphysics, an *ontology of violence*, defined as 'a reading of the world which assumes the priority of force and tells how this force is best managed and confined by counter-force'.[87] Grounded in a nominalist metaphysics, secularism portrays the world as immanently conflictual and chaotic, a Hobbesian war of all against all. In an attempt to contain and defuse religion, seen as a potential threat to any given order, secularism invents a purely areligious domain known as the secular. How then, may religion be contained rhetorically? For Milbank, scientific sociology provides a part of the answer.

Sociology, in Milbank's analysis, is not a scientific project launched to understand religion in an unprejudicial manner but a study that imagines a realm beyond the religious, unpolluted by it, as it were. Bred in a neo-Kantian tradition,[88] sociologists such

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[86] Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, 83.
[87] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 4.
[88] Milbank follows and, in some ways, 'completes' the analysis made by Gillian Rose, who had already noticed the neo-Kantian foundation of modern sociology. According to Rose, making the social or the cultural a priori was essential for

as Durkheim and Weber came to conceptualise or (in some sense of the word) invent the social as a scientifically governable sphere of life. They thus radicalised the gap between the empirical and the metaphysical, or the social and the religious, by keeping the latter at a genial distance from the former. By this, sociology esteems religion, albeit in the form of a 'Kantian sublime: a realm of ineffable majesty beyond the bounds of the possibility of theoretical knowledge'.[89] Secular reasoning protects this sublime, although simultaneously refusing its influences in the empirical world. The *policing of the sublime* as Milbank calls it, this double process in sociology of treasuring religion while consigning it to the realm of ineffable experience

> exactly coincides with the actual operations of secular society which excludes religion from its modes of discipline and control, while protecting it as a 'private' value, and sometimes invoking it at the public level to overcome the antinomy of a purely instrumental and goalless rationality.[90]

Milbank thereby depicts a homology between the theoretical/scientific project undertaken by sociologists such as Simmel, Durkheim, Weber and Parsons, and modern societies' tendency to keep religion at bay, while seeing a spiritual and private religion as an exemplary form of ethical and moral reasoning.[91] In other words, scientific sociology, rooted in a (nominalist) original violence that can never be more than contained, provides a theoretical basis and legitimacy to secularism.

From these accounts, we can see that secularist theories of religion formulate the religious as inert and politically impotent, clearly distinguishable from politics, economy, eroticism, art or simply practical endeavours. In all of the accounts above, secularism is understood as a particular formulation of religion that leads to a marginalisation of it, often with the argument that religion is either essentially a private spiritual experience, and hence irrelevant to politics, or else religion is a container of violence, intolerance, and irrationality that are to be released into the public and political sphere. Often, these two arguments coalesce, with the implication that religion may be harmless in the private but perilous when combined with politics.

When I say that a theory belongs to a secularist concept of religion, I am referring to this ontologisation of religion as fundamentally irrelevant for political affairs, underwritten by an identification of religion with inner piousness, or as an obstacle to

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establishing a realm of values (Weber) or social facts (Durkheim) and was simply a classical neo-Kantian move that founded scientific sociology. See Gillian Rose, *Hegel Contra Sociology* (London/New York: Verso, 2009), 1–50.

[89] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 104.

[90] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 106.

[91] I would place Habermas in this category of thinkers as well. Habermas in fact revives the Kantian fascination with religion as containing a form for moral reasoning that may be advantageous in public discourse. See Jürgen Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge: Polity, 2008), chapter 8.

(what are identified as) secular ideals (democracy, human rights, toleration, peace), or as a rigid system of rules that have to be transformed or dissolved to achieve free individuals. A secularist theory of religion, according to my definition, dovetails ontology with ideology in exactly this manner: it portrays religion as a phenomenon unfit for or irrelevant to political affairs by referring to the very essence or nature of religion.

Main Argument and the Structure of the Dissertation

The main argument in this dissertation is that if social work is to take religion seriously, it is not fruitful to fully adopt and endorse a secularist concept of religion. It was proposed above that a secularist theory of religion cannot be separated from an ideological project of relegating religion from the public sphere. In my empirical material, I identify a tendency to do just this: to formulate religion in secularist terms. With the agenda of offering a theoretical reflection on how religion is being conceived of and intervened in within social work, I reach the conclusion that taking a definition of religion forged in the midst of an ideological project such as a secularist one and adopting it into a profession such as social work is unproductive. This is so because the purpose of a secularist theory of religion is ultimately to motivate and legitimate a marginalisation of religion. Instead of understanding religion in its full vigour and complexity, secularism merely reduces and expels it from public discourse.

In this dissertation I continuously problematise and try to expand on a secularist concept of religion. This is not because I want to bring down or debunk secularism as a political project or ideology. I am neither a philosopher nor a theologian, meaning that my purpose is not to say something about an ideal society or to argue for the place of religion in a given society. This is a dissertation in social work, and my allegiance is to social work. When I problematise or try to dispel secularist presumptions, I do this because I do not find them fruitful for social work. I am, and this deserves to be stressed, a pragmatist in this regard. Working out an alternative to a secularist concept of religion is a pragmatic endeavour, not an idealist one.

This dissertation is divided into seven chapters, including this one. In chapter 2, I show how work to prevent extremism brings with it a fascination with and interest in religion. In terrorism studies, it has been suggested that religiously justified terrorism is in a class of its own, to be seen as extremely violent and directed at sublime ideals rather than societal reform. This view of religion is carried over into radicalisation studies and influences not merely anti-terrorism practices but also the school system and social work. The way social workers come to work with religion is, I suggest, highly influenced by this trend of identifying social workers as potential counter-

extremist practitioners, which means that social work adopts a specific view of what religion is and does.

In chapters 3–6 I analyse and investigate the four themes of this dissertation in relation to religion in social work. In chapter 3, I investigate the role of doctrines in religion. Doctrine emerges from the analysis as an important topic for the way to address religion in work to prevent extremism and promote democracy. In such work, doctrines are given a salient and specific meaning, what I have come to term a propositionalist understanding of doctrines. On the basis of a genealogical investigation into the histories of doctrines in modernity, I propose an alternative view of doctrines. Doctrines, it is proposed, can have the function of frameworks that provide meaning to a community of believers. Doctrines in the form of frameworks are neither directly provable nor disprovable, since they operate on a somewhat different level. The practical implication from this reasoning is that trying to disprove a religious teaching is likely unproductive. A more productive approach when working with social problems related to religion would be to investigate and understand how a particular teaching becomes meaningful within a specific context.

Chapter 4 discusses the relation between liturgy and inner faith. In the interview material, I notice how religion and democracy respectively are linked to terms such as personal responsibility, emotions and convictions, from which I conclude that religion, on this reading, is conceived of most fundamentally as inner piousness. Study of the history of inwardness opens up a new potential path, as I suggest that there are forms of religion that do not rest on an inner base. Certain religious expressions and behaviours stand for themselves, as it were. This insight allows me to move beyond what we can term a spiritualistic vision of religion and provide an alternative, namely a phenomenological understanding of religion as a lifeworld. Of relevance to practice, there may be risk of confusion if one were to assume that a specific religious expression is motivated by inner belief. It may very well be the case that a religious practice becomes meaningful in other ways, unrelated to or not principally motivated by piousness. These alternative reasons that could potentially be disregarded or overlooked.

Chapter 5 on freedom in religious practice elaborates on how rules, rule following and freedom are discussed in the interview material. After having investigated the discontinuous history of freedom via two controversies (the problem of universals and the debate between Luther and Erasmus), it seems clear that freedom in the form of autonomy is by no means a self-evident framing of freedom. In setting out to elaborate on an alternative to freedom of choice, I draw on theorists who point us in the direction of a freedom that is not in polemic to determinism. Agency, on this account, needs to

be construed as the ability to act within a specific lifeworld, instead of in opposition to it (which is often how freedom is depicted in modernity). Paradoxically then, there are forms of freedom that are enabled by rule following or habits. The argument is that social work could incorporate these understandings of freedom into its understanding of religion so as not to ascribe unfreedom to religious actors when in fact they are merely operating with a slightly different understanding of freedom. The risk as I see it is that practitioners privilege certain religious expressions at the expense of others, or even more drastically, that they try to liberate clients who in their own understanding are in no need of liberation.

The last of the thematic chapters, chapter 6, investigates whether religious language could be cultivated in a productive way in encounters between religious citizens and secular citizens or whether a neutral and universally accessible language is preferable. After having investigated how dialogue is framed and understood in the interview material, I critically interrogate the theories of Jürgen Habermas in order to determine an appropriate path towards a theory for social work. In the interview material, religion is linked to indiscriminate violence and gender inequality, ideas about religion that are further examined through literature on theological and philosophical history. I reach the conclusion that there is potential in religious language for fruitful encounters, motivated by the fact that history has shown that religious actors were in fact a driving force in processes of female emancipation. If religious actors have cooperated with secular forces historically, for example in the work to introduce human rights and gender equality, which has been the case, then why not mobilise the agency and critical potential in religious language rather than exclude it?

In the final chapter of the dissertation, chapter 7, I summarise the main conclusions drawn in each of the chapters. In summarising the insights from the investigations into the interview material and the history of the ideas and themes identified there, it is suggested that secularistic theories of religion are insufficient in relation to social work. For more productive work, I propose that we instead adopt a phenomenological understanding of religion, religion as a *lifeworld*. The advantages of such a vision are that it may grasp the religious in a more encompassing manner. Secularistic notions of religion often oscillate between seeing religion either as inflexible and timeless doctrines or else as entirely subjective. Phenomenology can provide a way out of this oscillation by grasping the religious in its dynamic and situated character. The practical implications of doing so are that change becomes an immanent feature of the religious itself. Working with religious citizens, even if the purpose is to change their behaviours, does not mean drastically altering their views but rather spurring changes within the lifeworld itself.

2. RELIGION IN RADICALISATION THEORIES

The empirical material in this study is comprised of interviews with practitioners working to prevent extremism and promote democracy. Such work provides an interesting data set as it involves one of the clearer ways in which religion is now encountered in social work, so making it a good starting point for theorisation. This chapter provides some background to how religion, through the discourse on violent extremism, has come to be more visible in social work. I further show that a specific understanding of religion permeates this discourse and that this understanding of religion has been carried over into social work and related professions, much in the same way that the discourse on terrorism has shaped the wider discourse on religion and Islam in Western societies in the last two decades.

It is suggested in this chapter that the terms 'radicalisation' and 'violent extremism' enshrine a specific view of religion because they arose in the context of intense debates on Islamic terrorism and pressure on Western states to counteract the perceived threat from Islamic radicals. The concept 'radicalisation', despite its ideologically neutral connotations of describing or explaining the process of becoming a radical, is genealogically linked to the so-called War on Terror that began in the aftermath of 9/11 when radical Islam was identified as a threat to Western civilisations. Radicalisation carries with it a view of religion as predisposed to lapse into excessive violence. Theorisations on a specific form of terrorism, religiously motivated and, it seemed, more lethal and less discriminate than secular terrorism, were present during the 1990s. But the horrific event known as 9/11 solidified them, making it something of an axiom by which the proportions of the act confirmed that the predictions of terrorism studies had been correct. It was argued that an act on such a scale and with such indiscrimination as regards it victims proved that religious terrorism is a case of its own.

This understanding of religion then carried over from the discussion in counter-terrorism and terrorism studies into social work, caring professions and education through the terms radicalisation and violent extremism, both of which have been adopted by social workers and similar professionals. In order to understand how religion is conceptualised in work to prevent extremism and promote democracy, it is important not to disregard the genealogy of radicalisation. This chapter is thus devoted to an explication of how work to prevent extremism in social work came to emerge, and its implicit assumptions.

Defining Terrorism

An important concept guiding the discourse and the work to prevent radicalisation and violent extremism is religious terrorism, or what is sometimes referred to as 'new terrorism'. But before elaborating on what supposedly distinguishes religious terrorism from secular terrorism, the term 'terrorism' itself needs to be explained. Here follows a very brief explanation of some of the ways in which terrorism can be understood, with no pretentions of providing an exhaustive description. The reason for describing terrorism conceptually is to prepare for the main argument in this chapter, which is that a particular theory in terrorism studies, one that emphasises religion as a motivating factor, still resonates in the now popular terms 'radicalisation' and 'violent extremism'.

Terrorism owes its name to Robespierre's *Reign of Terror*, that is, the excessive use of death penalties against those considered to be traitors to the regime during the years 1792–1794 in France during the French Revolution. For Robespierre and his followers, the term had positive connotations. The contemporary use of the term, 'to mean a *revolutionary* or anti-government activity undertaken by non-state or subnational entities' differs significantly from its earlier use, where 'the *régime de la terreur* was an instrument of governance wielded by the recently established revolutionary *state*'.[92] Terrorism was not anathema to democracy and justice, at least not for Robespierre and his ilk. Sophie Wahnich has even argued, contrary to what is commonly held, that the 'Terror was not an uncontrolled explosion of destructive madness'[93]; it 'was the historic moment when the sovereign violence of "making die" was that of a people driven to make use of it to maintain the extraordinary claim to

[92] Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 3.
[93] Slavoj Žižek, 'Foreword: The Dark Matter of Violence,' in Sophie Wahnich, *In Defence of the Terror: Liberty or Death in the French Revolution*, trans. David Fernbach (London/New York: Verso, 2012), xiii.

have conquered sovereignty'.[94] Wahnich suggests that the Terror was about restraining the people's vengeance, strikingly noticeable in the French revolutionary politician George Jacques Danton's words: 'let us be terrible so as to save the people from being so.'[95] In its modern usage, the term 'terrorism' can hardly be said to have such connotations. Terrorism is usually neither considered to be the exclusive domain of the state nor related to democracy and justice. This initial formulation of terrorism has been displaced by a definition emphasising violent social movements and insurgents.

The term is elusive and difficult to define because of its context-dependent nature.[96] A common phrase to describe the predicament of defining terrorism is that one person's terrorist is another person's freedom fighter. Ariel Merari staunchly rejects such a clouding of the term, however. There are popular tendencies to formulate terrorism in terms of morality, as acts of evil,[97] but for Merari, the real difference between freedom fighters and terrorists is not a difference in sentiments. Instead, she says that the two terms operate on radically different levels: whereas 'terrorism' is a method, the term 'freedom fighter' describes a cause.[98] I will return to this discussion later in the chapter.

But first, we need a more distinct definition of terrorism. Terrorism scholar Bruce Hoffman goes to great lengths to find a solid definition of terrorism. For Hoffman, terrorism is a *political* concept that denotes 'violence – or, equally important, the threat of violence – used and directed in pursuit of, or in service of, a political aim'.[99] Hoffman sees terrorism as systematic and planned activities. In contrast to Merari, Hoffman seeks a definition that does not describe only a specific method or a specific kind of violence, for an agnostic definition of this sort does not adequately differentiate between violence perpetrated by the state and violence conducted by insurgents.[100] The difference between these, Hoffman suggests, is that when violent acts of states violate established rules of war, they are subject to judicial remedies. By contrast, 'one of the fundamental raison d'être of international terrorism is a refusal to be bound by such rules of warfare and codes of conduct.'[101]

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[94] Sophie Wahnich, *In Defence of the Terror: Liberty or Death in the French Revolution*, trans. David Fernbach (London/New York: Verso, 2012), 97.
[95] George Jacques Danton cited in Wahnich, *In Defence of the Terror*, 63.
[96] Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*; Lisa Stampnitzky, *Disciplining Terror: How Experts Invented 'Terrorism'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).
[97] Lisa Stampnitzky, *Disciplining Terror.*
[98] Ariel Merari, 'Terrorism as a strategy of insurgency,' in *The History of Terrorism: From Antiquity to ISIS*, ed. Gérard Chaliand and Arnaud Blin (Oakland California: University of California Press, 2016), 27.
[99] Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 2–3.
[100] Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 25.
[101] Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 28.

Hoffman further distinguishes terrorism from guerrilla warfare, insurgencies and criminal violence, the difference being that terrorists do not operate in armed units, do not (deliberately) engage in combat with military forces, and do not exercise control over a populace.[102] Thus, although adopting similar tactics, terrorism can be distinguished from insurgency and guerrilla warfare. The same goes for criminals. Although terrorism is a criminal act, terrorists have a political message and are, as Hoffman puts it, altruistic: terrorists believe in a higher purpose or good. A recurring point in Hoffman's thought is that terrorism is a *rational* activity; meticulously planned and executed, with a well-defined purpose. According to Stampnitzky, this issue of rationality has been widely debated in terrorism studies, for there are tendencies to describe terrorism as irrational.[103] But for Hoffman, even seemingly irrational tactics such as suicide bombings are de facto rational; suicide bombings are inexpensive and effective tactics[104] that draw media coverage and have the ability to shape public opinion. Nevertheless, however rational terrorism may be, terrorism rarely succeeds in its goals[105] and 'seen in historical perspective it seldom has been more than a nuisance',[106] as Walter Laqueur expresses it.

As already noted, Hoffman distinguishes between violence perpetrated by the state and violence perpetrated by insurgents. This too is a recurring topic for discussion in terrorism studies; is terrorism a destabilising tactic performed exclusively by non-state actors, or is terrorism a method that can be adopted also by governments? In this regard, Charles Tilly is famous for proposing an agnostic definition of terrorism, a definition that is indiscriminate in regard to state and non-state violence. For Tilly, terrorism is an 'asymmetrical deployment of threats and violence against enemies using means that fall outside the forms of political struggle routinely operating within some current regime'.[107] Tilly thus emphasises the non-routine character of terrorism, and it is this non-routinised, unexpected character of terrorism that makes it truly terrifying.[108]

This question is further explored by Martin Miller in his book *The Foundations of Modern Terrorism*. For Miller, the issue is not merely whether we can define state terror qua terror. Not only can terrorism be adopted by any actor, but it is also shaped and made within a dynamic relation *between* actors. Let me flesh out his argument.

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[102] Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 35–41.
[103] Stampnitzky, *Disciplining Terror.*
[104] Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 154.
[105] Martin A. Miller, *The Foundations of Modern Terrorism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 7.
[106] Walter Laqueur, *The New Terrorism: Fanaticism and the Arms of Mass Destruction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 3.
[107] Charles Tilly, 'Terror, Terrorism, Terrorists,' *Sociological Theory* 22, no. 1 (2004): 5, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3648955.
[108] Colin J. Beck, *Radicals, Revolutionaries, and Terrorists* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015), 28–9.

For Miller, terrorism is 'repeated acts of violence' that 'create an atmosphere of fear, insecurity and mistrust in civilian society'.[109] So far, Hoffman and Miller are in agreement. But Miller also emphasises the interaction between different groups and actors, both non-state and state. By this, he suggests that terrorism is shaped when legitimate authority is contested in states of political instability.[110]

From this argument, Miller reaches the conclusion that terrorism cannot be understood by focusing exclusively on *either* the terrorist state or the non-state terrorist groups. What needs to be acknowledged is the interaction between them. Terrorism becomes the method of choice when certain conditions are met, conditions by which violence is finally (seen as) inescapable. That is, the interactions between actors can, due to certain conditions, produce an arms race of sorts by which both antagonists move towards increasingly violent strategies. State officials and insurgent leaders become 'deeply linked with one another, and neither can easily move to non-violent alternatives, once committed to the path defined by the conditions of terror', Miller writes.[111] Actors become committed to this path as political goals are increasingly formulated as unrealisable and unattainable without the use of violence. Violence becomes a necessity in the minds of actors, both those working for the state and for the insurgents.[112]

In his approach to interconnect insurgents and counterterrorism, Miller even suggest that adversaries within a context of an increasingly violent context tend to adopt similar tactics, imitating each other in a process he calls *mirroring*. By this, Miller is not only endorsing a definition of terrorism; he is also proposing an *explanation* of how terrorism becomes a potential method and why it has become a permanent constituent of modern politics. I shall not dig too deep into this explanation since that would lead me astray. But it is crucial to note that Miller proposes that there are no terrorist states, nor are there any permanent terrorist organisations. There are, however, *states of terror*; conditions where terrorism becomes the preferred choice, even seemingly inescapable because certain political goals are (perceived as) unrealisable otherwise.

Thorup and Brænder provide yet another understanding of terrorism. Rather than adopting the term 'terrorism', Thorup and Brænder use the concept 'terroristic figures', so avoiding an essentialist definition of terrorism. In their view, terrorism should be understood in the light of the emergence of a state and particularly, the

[109] Miller, *The Foundations of Modern Terrorism,* 1.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Miller, *The Foundations of Modern Terrorism*, 2.
[112] Miller, *The Foundations of Modern Terrorism*, 254.

state's monopoly on violence.[113] The state has made use of non-state actors in its (often bloody) struggles against its opponents.

> The modern state has, in its critical and elongated establishment and in its steady struggle for survival, been at war against a range of terroristic figures whose primary characteristics are *neither* their use of violence *nor* only specifically their use of violence against civilians. The terroristic figure is *not* characterised by its means or its goals, but as its *status as a private conductor of violence*.[114]

Terrorism is neither a specific method, nor does it have a specific rationale or motivation (e.g., religion or politics). It is rather because of the perpetrators' status as *private* violent actors that they become perceived as terroristic, which means that they are seen as illegitimate. It is as adversaries to the state's monopoly on violence that some actors, in the state's attempts to delegitimise them, are prescribed the status of terrorists.

The formalisation of the state's violence (e.g., by hierarchisation, extensive use of uniforms, formal wars between sovereign states in specific spaces or battlefields) as well as the privatisation, and hence delegitimisation of some forms of violence (e.g., the nobility's right to bear arms, fight duels, etc.), enabled the state to effectively pronounce itself the sole legitimate violent actor within a territory. In its attempts to establish a monopoly on violence, the state has made use of private actors, either by forming alliances with them in their battles against its adversaries or by declaring them illegitimate. This means that with a monopoly on violence comes a monopoly on definition by which the state can declare some non-state actors legitimate (and hence ally with them). Others, declared illegitimate, are contested and fought. Netterstrøm provides an interesting example of how royalty allied itself with the nobility (who wanted to secure their privileges) during peasant rebellions in the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries, as a way for royalty to establish its rule.[115] The farmers was thus framed as threats to social order, which delegitimised their claims, that is to say, they become terroristic.

On this reasoning, terrorism is defined only in its relation to the state. Thorup and Brænder say that 'the state creates terroristic figures in the broadest sense of the word

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[113] See Max Weber, 'Science as a Vocation,' in *From Max Weber: Essays in* Sociology, ed. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (London: Routledge, 1991), 129–56; Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Doubleday, Garden City NY, 1969).

[114] Mikkel Thorup and Morten Brænder, 'Staten og dens udfordrere – Vold som terror eller krig,' in *Antiterrorismens idéhistorie: States og vold i 500 år*, ed. Mikkel Thorup and Morten Brænder (Aarhus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag, 2007), 19, my translation.

[115] Jeppe Büchert Netterstrøm, 'Den fejdende adelsman, den voldelige bonde og staten – "terroristiske figurer" og "antiterrorisme" i Danmark 1450-1650,' in *Antiterrorismens idéhistorie: States og vold i 500* år, ed. Mikkel Thorup and Morten Brænder (Aarhus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag, 2007), 69–80.

"create". It brings forth, uses and sponsors non-state actors while it circumscribes, criminalises and combats others.'[116] Counter-terrorism thus becomes an effective means to establish dominance within a territory. As such, terroristic figures and the state are symbiotically related to the point that terroristic figures are determined 'not by their praxis or goals, but in their relationship to the state' and it is only within this symbiotic relationship and the monopoly on definition of the state that a political actor becomes 'in the broadest sense of the word, a terrorist'.[117]

From this rather brief investigation of the concept of terrorism, it can be said that there seems to be a consensus that terrorism involves various violent tactics meant to destabilise an enemy. This is often done by inflicting fear in order to sway opinion and achieve a political goal. There is a clearly extensive disagreement, however, over whether such tactics can be deployed by any actor.

Religious Terrorism: More Lethal, Less Discriminate?

If we are to understand how religion has come to be a topic and an issue within social work, we must begin with a strand of terrorism studies that focuses more directly on religious terrorism, sometimes referred to as *new terrorism*. The ideas born here are later carried over into radicalisation theory, which in turn has influenced social work and other professions. In this section I briefly present the main claims made by the scholars in this school of thought. Although there are important internal differences between them, these all agree that religious terrorism follows a different path and has a different rationale than secular terrorism. This line of reasoning has secularist connotations in that it provides an ideological motivation for expelling the religious from politics, as religious violence is thought to be particularly violent and indiscriminate.

The idea of religious terrorism a specific form of terrorism has its roots in the work of political scientists like David C. Rapoport who argues that terrorism comes in trends or waves, and that in a given moment, some forms of terrorism are more popular and more widely used than others. He identifies a new form of terrorism, religious terrorism, that can be distinguished from older ones and has a different rationale from its secular precursors.

According to Rapoport, terrorist acts do not arise in a vacuum but tend to follow different rationales and trajectories. They come in waves, with a wave being defined as 'a cycle of activity in a given time period – a cycle characterized by expansion and contraction phases' in which 'similar activities occur in several countries, driven by a

[116] Thorup and Brænder, 'Staten og dens udfordrere,' 23, my translation.
[117] Mikkel Thorup and Morten Brænder, 'Undtagelse og terror,' in *Antiterrorismens idéhistorie: States og vold i 500 år*, ed. Mikkel Thorup and Morten Brænder (Aarhus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag, 2007), 53, my translation.

common predominant energy that shapes the participating groups' characteristics and mutual relationship'.[118] Up until now, we have witnessed four distinct waves: anarchist, anticolonial, New Left and the contemporary religious wave of terrorism. These distinct waves, although influenced by previous ones, formulate their strategies and their overall goals in different ways.

What is of particular importance to the discussion here is how Rapoport formulates and understands the religious wave. In the contemporary wave of terrorism, religion has a more central status than it did in previous waves. It is not that religion is an entirely new way of motivating terrorism. But in the religious wave, religion is at the heart of terrorism. Previous terrorists, although some of them were religious, defined their final goal as realising a secular state. But this is no longer the case. The telos of religious terrorism is to impose religious values or establish religious autonomy rather than to establish a secular state. Rapoport further argues that 'Islam is at the heart of this wave'[119] and claims that the starting points for the religious wave were the Iranian revolution in 1979, the new Islamic century and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

In the beginning, Islamic terror was often driven by and revolved around an anti-American sentiment. To illustrate this point, consider Osama Bin Laden's fatwa:

> The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies – civilians and military – is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it, in order to liberate the al-Aqsa Mosque and the holy mosque [Mecca] from their grip, and in order for their armies to move out of all the lands of Islam, defeated and unable to threaten any Muslim.[120]

In the quotation above anti-Americanism coalesces with religious imperatives, which becomes something of a hallmark of the religious wave of terrorism as portrayed in Rapoport's writings. Al-Qaeda has a significant place in Rapoport's work. One could even say that the status of Al-Qaeda as a threat to Western civilisations at the time of Rapoport's writing becomes an argument for the wave theory itself. Al-Qaeda becomes an example of how religion is at the heart of contemporary terrorism.

The American historian Walter Laqueur is another advocate of the thesis that we live in an era defined by religious terrorism. Laqueur began to use the term *new terrorism* to describe not merely religious but sectarian/fanatic terrorism and its potential use of weapons of mass destruction. What matters most for my purposes, however, is

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[118] David C. Rapoport, 'The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism,' in *Attacking Terrorism: Elements of a Grand Strategy*, ed. A.K. Cronin and J.M. Lodes (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press., 2004), 47.
[119] Rapoport, 'The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism,' 61.
[120] Osama Bin Laden, 'Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders,' in *Voices of Terror: Manifestos, Writings and Manuals of Al Qaeda, Hamas, and other Terrorists from Around the World and Throughout the Ages*, ed. Walter Laqueur (Naperville, Illinois: Sourcebooks, 2004), 412.

Laqueur's conceptualisation of religious terrorism rather than his emphasis on the use of new technology. For Laqueur, religion has always been an important ingredient in terrorism. He uses the example of the Sicarii,[121] the Assassins[122] and other religious sects to make his point. Now, however, it seems as though political or secular terrorism has been displaced by religious terrorism. Laqueur too mentions Islam in particular. In fact, he radicalises the claim made above by Rapoport by suggesting that 'most of the violent conflicts, internal and external, happened and continue to happen in Muslim countries or in those with active Muslim minorities'.[123] Further, Laqueur proposes that the missionary elements are more aggressive in radical Islam than in other religions and that there is a deep-rooted hostility towards the West in many Arabic countries.

In line with Rapoport, Laqueur suggests that although terrorism studies should not focus exclusively on Islamic terrorism, '[i]t has to devote more time and space investigating Muslim and Islamic terrorism than other such movements simply because other such movements are less numerous, less effective, and politically less important.'[124] But what then, is the main difference between the 'old' and the new terrorism that Laqueur identifies?

> The state of affairs is different with regard to terrorists of the lunatic fringe, certain religious fanatics, and terrorist groups that are not interested in negotiations but want to destroy the enemy *tout court.* […] Once upon a time terrorism was mainly 'propaganda by deed,' and terrorists' intention was to create as much noise as possible, not to cause the greatest number of fatalities. But this, quite often, is no longer true. The element of propaganda has receded or even disappeared altogether, and the intention now is to wreak as much destruction and havoc as possible.[125]

The take-home message in Laqueur's description above is that violence, rather than being a means to an end, is now an end in itself.

Hoffman also qualifies as one of the group of scholars who identify religion as the major element in contemporary terrorism. Hoffman acknowledges the religious elements in terror organisations such as the IRA (Irish Republican Army) and PLO

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[121] The Sicarii were a group of Jewish dissenters that were opposed to the Roman occupation of Judea during the first century. The Sicarii used daggers and performed public executions as part of their struggle for liberation of Palestine from Roman colonisation. See Gérard Chaliand and Arnaud Blin, 'Zealots and Assassins,' in *The History of Terrorism: From Antiquity to ISIS*, ed. Gérard Chaliand and Arnaud Blin (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2016), 55–8.

[122] The Assassins were an armed group of Shia Muslims that opposed Seljuk rule between the years 1090–1275 through the use of assassinations. Despite being weaker than their enemy in sheer numbers, their effective tactics and organisation posed a threat to the authorities. See Chaliand and Blin, 'Zealots and Assassins,' 59–78.

[123] Laqueur, *New Terrorism*, 128.

[124] Laqueur, *New Terrorism* 130.

[125] Walter Laqueur, 'The New Face of Terrorism,' *The Washington Quarterly* 21, no. 4 (1998): 171–72, https://doi.org/10.1080/01636609809550356.

(Palestine Liberation Organisation), but in line with Rapoport he says that their principal motives were political (nationalist or ethnic separatist, for example). In contrast, contemporary terrorism is driven principally by religious motives: 'the religious motive is overriding; and indeed, the religious imperative for terrorism is the most important defining characteristic of terrorist activity today', he says.[126] It draws inspiration from the Iranian revolution in 1979, which placed religion on the terrorist map, so to speak. (Hoffman here adopts a similar stance to Rapoport.) However, Hoffman suggests that what was originally a trajectory linked exclusively to Islam has now evolved into a broader trend of religious terrorism is general:

> while the reemergence of modern religious terrorism was initially closely associated with the Islamic revolution in Iran, within a decade of that event none of the world's major religions could claim to be immune to the same volatile mixture of faith, fanaticism, and violence.[127]

Hoffman thus accepts the thesis laid out by Laqueur and Rapoport, although he also suggests that fanaticism and excessive violence has spread to all of the world religions.

In Hoffman's view, what distinguishes religious from secular terrorism is the tendency to indiscriminate killings on a massive scale, a type only rarely pursued by secular terrorists. Massive and indiscriminate killings are inconsonant with secular/political goals, seen as being smaller and more concrete in scope. Hence, massive indiscriminate killings are counterproductive for political terrorists. We can see here that the (extraordinary, rare) event of 9/11 is extrapolated by Hoffman into a more general theory of religious terrorism. In contradistinction to secular terrorism aimed at concrete and realisable goals, religious terrorism is understood as *always* having sublime goals. Violence in religious terrorism is thus more about eliminating broad categories of people than about achieving a political goal (as with secular terrorists). Violence becomes 'an end in itself – a sacred duty executed in direct response to some theological demand or imperative'.[128] Hoffman further elaborates this point:

> [T]errorism motivated either in whole or in part by a religious imperative, where violence is regarded by its practitioners as a divine duty or sacramental act, embraces markedly different means of legitimation and justification than that committed by secular terrorists, and these distinguishing features lead, in turn, to yet greater bloodshed and destruction.[129]

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[126] Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 82.
[127] Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 85.
[128] Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 239.
[129] Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 83.

In this new religious terrorism, attacks are more indiscriminate and violent, according to Hoffman. It deserves to be mentioned briefly that the Swedish historian of religion Mattias Gardell has problematised this line of argument (although not in direct polemic to Hoffman) by saying that 'Despite the fact that Islamists are located in supranational networks, most of the movements have been primarily oriented towards sub-global – local or national – goals and problem fields'.[130] He thus argues that sharp distinction between secular, political terrorism with realisable goals vis-à-vis religious terrorism with sublime goals is hard to sustain.

Yet another scholar who adopts a similar line of reasoning to the main scholars above is the American sociologist Mark Juergensmeyer. In his book *Terror in the Mind of God* he argues that in contradistinction to secular/political terrorism, religion now supplies 'not only the ideology but also the social identity and the organization structure for the perpetrators'.[131] Those of interest to Juergensmeyer are disenfranchised groups whose primary concern and motivation is religious. While acknowledging secular, mainly leftist or ethnic separatist terrorism, he proclaims that 'more often it has been religion – often in combination with social, political, and other factors – that has been tied to terrorist acts'.[132] His view on the matter is not, as for some 'apologists', that violence and religion are connected merely in 'mutant' forms, in fundamentalism. Instead, he says that 'within the histories of religious traditions – from biblical wars to crusading ventures and great acts of martyrdom – violence has lurked as a shadowy presence.'[133] In other words, violence and terrorism are *immanent* to religion, according to Juergensmeyer.

A core characteristic of religious terrorism, according to Juergensmeyer, is that acts of terror are *symbolic* rather than strategic. The dates, the contexts or the targets, for example are chosen not because of their instrumental value, but because they are emblematic in some ways. Religious terrorism is an act of *performance*; it creates an illusion of power and grandiosity.[134] Religious terrorists present themselves as part of a cosmic war, a struggle between good and evil.[135] These ideas of a cosmic war make the movements even more lethal:

> What makes religious violence particularly savage and relentless is that its perpetrators have placed such religious images of divine struggle – cosmic war – in the

[130] Mattias Gardell, *Bin Ladin i våra hjärtan: Globaliseringen och framväxten av politisk islam* (Stockholm: Leopard Förlag, 2005), 287, my translation.
[131] Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, Fourth edition (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2017), 4.
[132] Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, 5.
[133] Ibid.
[134] Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, 166.
[135] Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, 184.

> service of worldly political battles. For this reason, acts of religious terrorism serve not only as tactics in a political strategy but also as evocations of a much larger spiritual confrontation.[136]

By being exclusively symbolic, as Juergensmeyer suggests, religious terrorism tends to absolutize its enemies, thereby resulting in more indiscriminate and bloodier battles.

An article by Gunning and Jackson resolutely questions the idea that there is a specific mode of religious terrorism distinguishable from secular terror. Gunning and Jackson's proposition is that the alleged qualitative features that separate religious from secular terrorism lack empirical grounds:

> The case of Hamas provides a poignant illustration of the problem of labelling. It does not qualify as 'religious' on numerous fronts: its leaders are predominantly secular professionals elected in internal elections, its ideology is heavily influenced by nationalism, its targets are not typically religious and its operational logic resembles that of many secular groups. Yet, its leaders derive their authority in part from religious sources. Religious knowledge, piety and involvement in the mosque all serve to enhance a leader's symbolic capital. However, even this religious capital has arguably secular qualities.[137]

They further suggest that Hamas 'cannot be meaningfully distinguished from other secular–nationalist liberation agendas, in particular those who regard their designated homeland as indivisible and having (quasi) sacred status'.[138] William T. Cavanaugh is even more relentless in his critique of the exceptionalisation of religious terrorism. For Cavanaugh, such rhetoric is a secularistic argument for expelling religion from the political arena by which the myth of religious violence 'helps to construct and marginalize a religious Other, prone to fanaticism, to contrast with the rational, peace-making, secular subject'[139] and 'serves to cast nonsecular social orders, especially Muslim societies, in the role of villain. [...] *Our* violence, being secular, is rational, peace-making, and sometimes regrettably necessary to contain *their* violence. We find ourselves obliged to bomb them into liberal democracy,'[140] Cavanaugh writes with flagrant indignation.

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[136] Ibid.

[137] Jeroen Gunning and Richard Jackson, 'What's So "Religious" about "Religious Terrorism"?,' *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 4, no. 3 (2011): 376, https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2011.623405.

[138] Ibid.

[139] William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 4.

[140] Ibid.

Despite this critique, the studies and ideas produced by the scholars presented in this section have been influential in public and policy discourse and have had implications for practice, such as social work, as we shall soon see.

Radicalisation: An Instrument in Policymaking

The investigation in this chapter gives an account of how religion has come to be more visible in social work through the case of violent extremism. The ideas of religion presented above by scholars such as Hoffman, Laqueur and Juergensmeyer have come to be incorporated into social work. How then, does the issue of terrorism, previously often formulated as an issue for security services, become a task for social workers to deal with? It is through changing terminology that terrorism became detached from connotations of warfare and the like, and was instead conceived of as an effect of poor integration, poverty and other social problems, and so terrorism came to be on the horizon of social work. The term 'radicalisation' was essential for this process to occur. This section presents the history and main assumptions regarding radicalisation, as it has been formulated in policy after 9/11.

In 2005, the concept 'radicalisation 'was authoritatively put into circulation by the EU Commission' in a policy document that 'served as the starting point for the extensive discussion of the mechanisms behind terrorism'.[141] As Lisa Stampnitzky has argued, the post 9/11 discussion on terrorism and its root causes was often impeded by the fact that any attempts to explain terrorism were often confused with apologetics, as a defence of terrorism. Stampnitzky describes the post-9/11 discourse as *politics of anti-knowledge* in which morality forecloses any attempts to produce knowledge on the matter.[142] Radicalisation provided a way out of this political and practical deadlock by providing tools to investigate and work with terrorism preventatively.

With a very broad brush, radicalisation can be defined as 'what goes on before the bomb goes off'[143] and has come to describe the processes and pathways for an individual to become engaged in ideological violence. Hörnqvist and Flyghed suggest three reasons for the popularity of the term 'radicalisation' in policy: (1) legal and discursive changes that facilitated a shift in focus from acts of terrorism to processes, (2) increased attention to the phenomenon known as *home-grown terrorism*, followed by an increased demand for preventative work and (3) a broader narrative in society

[141] Magnus Hörnqvist and Janne Flyghed, 'Exclusion or Culture? The Rise and the Ambiguity of the Radicalisation Debate', *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 5, no. 3 (2012): 319, https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2012.717788.
[142] Stampnitzky, *Disciplining Terror*, chapter 8.
[143] Mark Sedgwick, 'The Concept of Radicalization as a Source of Confusion,' *Terrorism and Political Violence* 22, no. 4 (2010): 479–94, https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2010.491009.

where the extent and nature of terrorism 'seemed to be saying something about the age and the society in which we were all living'.[144]

The concept 'home-grown terrorism' deserves to be explained. Whereas the 9/11 attacks were foreign attacks, the 7/7 bombings in London in 2005 and various other attacks in Europe since then were carried out by individuals born and raised in the very country they subsequently attacked. Home-grown terrorism is defined by two principal features that distinguish it from international terrorism: *Western belonging* and *autonomy* from formal terrorist organisations.[145] This shift in focus, from international terrorism to terrorism bred within Western societies, was central to the popularity of the radicalisation thesis. There are quite a few theories and models of radicalisation and I can mention only some of them here.

In his book *Leaderless Jihad*, Marc Sageman advocates a social-psychological approach to jihadisation. In trying to pin down how jihadisation can occur, Sageman begins by rejecting individualistic approaches to terrorism. Regardless of how seductive and easily translatable into interventions such may be, Sageman argues that individualistic approaches tend to conceive of terrorists in determinist terms: some individuals are predisposed to becoming terrorists, depicted as an almost inevitable process. A strong version of this train of thought even leads to searching for a terrorist gene. Sageman does not think highly of such theories. But a sociological approach is equally flawed, Sageman suggests. Factors such as poverty, relative deprivation, and restrictions of free speech, in other words, structural explanations, fail to provide sufficient explanations. Sageman rhetorically asks: 'If the same social, economic, political, or cultural factors are acting on millions of people, why do so very few become terrorists? […] What is specific about the few who become terrorists if the same forces that made them become terrorists act on the entire population?'[146]

For Sageman, although political, economic and cultural processes cannot be disregarded completely, such processes tell us little about the shaping of a collective identity necessary for engagement in terrorism. But neither can a simple top-down process, a trickle-down effect where the charisma of leaders and demagogues influences the individual, account for the vast radicalisation of Islam. The solution lies in middle-range theories – in social psychology and group psychology – with the main

[144] Hörnqvist and Flyghed, 'Exclusion or Culture', 320.

[145] Crone and Harrow suggest that these two features can be understood through a typology entailing four types of home-grown terrorism: internal autonomous, internal affiliated, external autonomous, and external affiliated. See Manni Crone and Martin Harrow, 'Homegrown Terrorism in the West,' *Terrorism and Political Violence* 23, no. 4 (2011): 521–36, https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2011.571556.

[146] Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 21.

point being that terrorist networks are not merely formal networks, shaped by ideological interest. Terrorist groups are social groups of friends:

> Terrorist groups are not formed by complete strangers who do not know each other. People who form terrorist groups know each other, often for a long time. They trust, and for the most part, have a great deal of affection for one another. They are often the extension of natural groups of friends and family.[147]

Sageman argues that Al-Qaeda can be analysed at two distinct levels: on one level, Al-Qaeda is a formal terrorist organisation, but the formal organisation has receded and lost much of its importance. Sageman suggests that we should instead speak of an Al-Qaeda *movement*, which is 'informal networks that mobilize people to resort to terrorism'.[148] Rather than investigating members of a formal terrorist organisation, Sageman investigates *participants* in the global Al-Qaeda movement.

Sageman uses the term '*bunch of guys*' to denote the process of how a group of close friends collectively become engaged in terrorism. The main route to engagement in jihadism is collective, either by joining together with friends or by joining because one's friends are engaged in it already. The main push factor is social ties, and the radical Islamic (jihadist) movement is comprised of individuals and groups that are engaged in a similar cause or struggle. It is a 'process of radicalization that generates small, local, self-organized groups in a hostile habitat but [these are] linked through the Internet [which] also leads to a disconnected global network, the leaderless jihad', he writes.[149] Sageman's theory has been influential in the field of counter-radicalisation, most likely because of its applicability to practice by which today's associate may be tomorrow's terrorist. The problematic implication of this train of thought is, of course, that individuals may become 'guilty by association'.

Nevertheless, the whole field of radicalisation studies is directed at the pragmatic level of providing ways to identify and prevent future terrorists. Sageman is far from alone here. By comparing the radicalisation process with a staircase, Fathali Moghaddam suggests that although indignation may be grounded in material conditions, the first real step towards radicalism is perceived injustice, particularly at a group level. The psychological term for this is *relative deprivation*. The next step is the development of a displacement of aggression, for example, displacement of an out-group, followed by a moral engagement in the cause of a particular violent movement. After entering a terrorist organisation, stronger justifications are adopted until

[147] Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad*, 24.
[148] Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad*, 31.
[149] Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad*, 143.

finally, the individual engages in violence and terrorism.[150] In a review of Moghaddam's model, Lygre et al. are critical of the linear path described by Moghaddam. They suggest that although some of the steps in Moghaddam's model are empirically grounded, the links between these steps are not supported in science. To conceive of the process as a series of steps is thus problematic as some steps are omitted. Radicalisation should, in their view, be understood as the 'result of multiple contributing factors, where the likelihood of terrorism would increase as more of the six components converge in a given situation'.[151]

An approach similar to Moghaddam's is found in the quite influential model developed for the New York City Police Department by Mitchell Silber and Arvin Bhatt. This model entails four discrete steps: pre-radicalisation, self-identification, indoctrination and finally, Jihadisation.[152,153] However, there has been immense debate as to whether radicalisation can be conceived of in terms of such straightforward processes. Both Moghaddam and Silber and Bhatt use the staircase metaphor to describe radicalisation, indicating that there are discrete steps or stages followed rather similarly by emerging radicals. Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko use the metaphor of a pyramid.[154] Regardless of the metaphor, critics have argued that this linear way of understanding radicalisation fails to account for the complexity of the radicalisation process. Andrew Silke, for instance, rejects a staircase model altogether by arguing that radicalisation entails not steps but *factors* that 'interact and mesh together in a complex manner' and it is 'the combined impact of a number of factors that pushes and pulls someone into becoming a terrorist, and these factors will vary depending on the culture, the social context, the terrorist group and the individual involved'.[155] Pursuing a similar point, Mohammed Hafez and Creighton Mullins claim that although 'the cognitive dimension of adopting an extremist worldview that accepts in the legitimacy of the use of violence to advance a social or political goal' is an important factor

[150] Fathali M. Moghaddam, 'The staircase to terrorism: A psychological exploration', *American Psychologist* 60, no. 2 (Feb-Mar 2005): 161–9, https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.60.2.161.
[151] Ragnhild B. Lygre, Jarle Eid, Gerry Larsson and Magnus Ranstorp, 'Terrorism as a process: A critical review of Moghaddam's 'Staircase to Terrorism',' *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology* 52, no. 6 (Dec 2011): 615, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9450.2011.00918.x.
[152] Mitchell D. Silber and Arvin Bhatt, *Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat* (New York: New York City Police Department, 2007).
[153] According to Aly and Striegher, religion plays a far lesser role than anticipated by Silber and Bhatt. See Anne Aly and Jason-Leigh Striegher, 'Examining the Role of Religion in Radicalization to Violent Islamist Extremism,' *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 35, no. 12 (2012): 849–62, https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2012.720243.
[154] Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, 'Understanding political radicalization: The two-pyramids model,' *American Psychologist* 72, no. 3 (Apr 2017): 205–16, https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000062.
[155] Andrew Silke, 'Holy Warriors: Exploring the Psychological Processes of Jihadi Radicalization', *European Journal of Criminology* 5, no. 1 (2008): 105, https://doi.org/10.1177/1477370807084226.

in adopting violence, 'it does not make it inevitable'.[156] Hence, rather than to speak of a sequence of steps, Hafez and Mullins suggest the metaphor of a puzzle by which factors such as grievances, networks, ideologies, and support structures together and in contextualised ways influence radicalisation processes.

Against the background of these various ways of conceptualising radicalisation, it can be deduced that it is the supposed ability to predict and prevent that explains the now indisputable shift from terrorism to radicalisation, which is also why it has been incorporated into social work. Despite internal critical discussion of the exact metaphor, steps or factors, the term 'radicalisation' has proven to be indispensable to policy-makers and practitioners (e.g., social workers) as it allows them to govern and work with future (potential) radicals or 'terrorists-in-becoming'. Arun Kundnani formulates it precisely by saying that 'radicalisation discourse was, from the beginning, circumscribed by the demands of counter-terrorist policy-makers rather than an attempt to objectively study how terrorism comes into being'.[157]

Radicalisation models satisfy the need of practitioners to develop instrumental approaches to early prevention of terrorism. Individual models describing pathways, which rely on theories of vulnerability by which some backgrounds or experiences constitute an 'at-risk' individual, are powerful tools for practitioners and social workers. The development and application of screening methods have resulted in a narrowing of the search, often to young Muslims in vulnerable or poor areas, and justify targeted interventions that serve as powerful tools for policy-makers:

> For policy-makers and state agencies, tasked with identifying 'risk' factors and developing timely interventions designed to disrupt the radicalisation process preferably before 'violent extremism' is evident, the consequences of such thinking are as clear as they are far-reaching.[158]

As a vehicle and an instrument for prediction, 'radicalisation' serves its purpose, it seems.

Apart from the critique of metaphors and specific risk factors, there is a more general critique of the term 'radicalisation'. For example, Donatella Della Porta has argued that radicalisation cannot be regarded as an individual phenomenon. Instead, she sees radicalisation as relational and dynamic: 'radicalization is not the effect of

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[156] Mohammed Hafez and Creighton Mullins, 'The Radicalization Puzzle: A Theoretical Synthesis of Empirical Approaches to Homegrown Extremism,' *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 38, no. 11 (2015): 961, https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2015.1051375.

[157] Arun Kundnani, 'Radicalisation: The Journey of a Concept,' *Race & Class* 54, no. 2 (2012): 5, https://doi.org/10.1177/0306396812454984.

[158] Vicki Coppock and Mark McGovern, '"Dangerous Minds"? Deconstructing Counter-Terrorism Discourse, Radicalisation and the "Psychological Vulnerability" of Muslim Children and Young People in Britain,' *Children & Society* 28, no. 3 (2014): 248, https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12060.

individual pathologies, but of complex group dynamics the understanding of which requires taking into account complex processes'.[159] She regards looking for individual pathways as a futile task because radicalisation is driven by dynamic and complex processes of internal struggles within a terrorist organisation, as well as through escalations of violence that take place in conflicts with a multiplicity of actors. Radicalisation, for Della Porta, cannot be defined as an internalisation of radical doctrine that compels individuals to resort to violence. Instead, radicalisation involves intensified conflicts and escalations of violence between actors (similar to Miller's argument above). As Della Porta further suggests, 'very often practical experiences are more relevant than the ideological commitment which comes up as a sort of legitimization of actions which have been developed'[160]. For instance, developing a hostile attitude towards security agencies and the police may have less to do with grand ideological narratives and be more related to past encounters with these agencies.

Building further on a relational approach, Eitan Alimi, Chares Demetriou and Lorenzo Bosi suggest that radicalisation has cognitive, environmental and relational aspects, but that the first two are mediated by the relational aspects. Like Della Porta, they consider that the ways in which actors are engaged in conflict triggers certain responses and shapes and delimits options. They take note of aspects such as bargaining or negotiation, which in some cases lead to the introduction of violence as well as an escalation of violence. Political violence is thus 'embedded in a complex web of socio-political relations'[161] by which 'values, norms, identities, as well as motivations, not only precede and shape contention, but they are also shaped by and changed in contention'.[162] Alimi, Demetriou and Bosi illustrate this with a hypothetical example:

> Newly developing political constraints or threats on the movement's space of action or ability to promote its goals, which we label *upward spirals of political opportunities*, might intensify *competition for power* among movement organisations and lead to employment of more confrontational, even violent tactics by one or more of these organisations. The realization of what is considered a more effective tactic of contention by one or more social movement organisations (SMOs) could bring about harsh repressive measures by agents of social control against the movement as a whole, which, in turn, could possibly lead to those same SMOs or others to

[159] Donatella Della Porta, *Social Movement Studies and Political Violence* (Aarhus: Centre for Studies in Islamism and Radicalisation (CIR) Department of Political Science, Aarhus University, 2009), 20.
[160] Della Porta, *Social Movement Studies and Political Violence*, 19–20.
[161] Eitan Y. Alimi, Chares Demetriou and Lorenzo Bosi, *The Dynamics of Radicalization: A Relational and Comparative Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 13.
[162] Alimi, Demetriou and Bosi, *The Dynamics of Radicalization*, 37–38.

raise the stakes and engage in more confrontational tactics.[163]

The relational approach is directly critical of the emphasis in security studies, which they regard as 'over-deterministic because they treat what they commonly term a militant or radical group as the sole driving force of the radicalization process'.[164]

This trend by which terrorism is conceived of more in terms of future and predictable behaviour linked to social problems and vulnerability has transformed counter-terrorism, with the result that social workers are identified as actors who can potentially contribute to counter-terrorism.

Radicalisation and Religious Violence

The main argument in this chapter is that a very specific view of religion is carried over from the discourse on new terrorism into social work. Radicalisation as a concept allowed this carrying over to occur. In order to elucidate this, this section elaborates on how religion is conceived of within radicalisation studies, and how this view was later adopted by social workers in their work to prevent radicalisation.

Many of the models mentioned above, such as Silber and Bhatt's, Moghaddam's, Sageman's, and others, are in fact tailor-made for the purpose of analysing and preventing *Islamic* radicalisation, not radicalisation in general. For example, Sageman writes about leaderless *jihad*, Silber and Bhatt have as the final step in their model a process they call *jihadisation*. The production of research and policy reports on Salafism and its theology[165] is another token of how closely religion, particularly Islam, is linked to theories of radicalisation. Kundnani has argued, convincingly, that the term 'radicalisation' in its contemporary usage is implicitly skewed towards an understanding of *Islamic* radicalisation. He argues that radicalisation studies in fact are limited to a far narrower question than the general causes of terrorism: 'why do some individual Muslims support an extremist interpretation of Islam that leads to violence?'[166] This is the real question posed, and the problem that radicalisation theorists try to answer. By this, it is suggested that Islamic radicalisation is an exceptional case, something that needs to be studied and investigated in its own right.

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[163] Alimi, Demetriou and Bosi, *The Dynamics of Radicalization*, 39

[164] Alimi, Demetriou and Bosi, *The Dynamics of Radicalization*, 13.

[165] See for example Quintan Wiktorowicz, 'Anatomy of the Salafi Movement,' *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 29, no. 3 (2006): 207–39, https://doi.org/10.1080/10576100500497004; Magnus Ranstorp, Filip Ahlin, Peder Hyllengren and Magnus Normark, 'Between Salafism and Salafi-Jihadism Influence and Challenges for Swedish Society,' Center for Asymmetric Threat Studies (CATS), at the Swedish Defence University, 2018; Phillipe Migaux, 'The Roots of Islamic Radicalism,' in *The History of Terrorism: From Antiquity to ISIS*, ed. Gérard Chaliand and Arnaud Blin (Oakland California: University of California Press, 2016), 255–313.

[166] Kundnani, 'Radicalisation', 5.

Kundnani uses Sageman as an example to show how radicalisation theories are linked to Islam.

In Kundnani's reading, Sageman's views are underwritten by an idea of religious terrorism as fundamentally different than other forms of terror, much like Rapoport, Laqueur and Juergensmeyer described above. Sageman repeats the ideas of new terrorism, now inserted into a practical and policy-laden task of preventing terrorism at an early stage, according to Kundnani. In my reading of Sageman, he argues that what drives a radicalisation process and makes Islamic extremism compelling is the belief that the modern or secular world rests upon a nihilist and amoral creed. Sageman says that 'religious terrorism [is] built on the belief that the world has decayed into a morass of greed and moral depravity'.[167] Islamic radicals are nostalgic in that they see a corruption of Islam in modernity, with sexual depravity and the hollowing of Islamic norms as a result. This is what drives a return to original teachings, such as in Salafism (derived from the word *salaf*, meaning the ancient ones). Sageman thus suggests that the idea of a depraved moral modernity underpins the religious wave or turning to terrorism, and even argues that those who 'are willing to sacrifice themselves in pursuit of a utopia and eventually use terrorist tactics to accelerate its coming, are essentially romantic men and women chasing a dream'.[168] The tonality of new terrorism scholars, at least to my reading, resonates clearly here.

In Kundnani's analysis of Sageman, the attempt to formulate a theory of radicalisation implicitly endorses, and is indeed founded upon, an a priori distinction between the new Islamic terrorism and the old, leftist secular version. This results in a strong interest in ideology, and despite being principally interested in the ways in which networks of friends join terrorist movements, Sageman's theory has theological dimensions. In Sageman's work, socialisation and sociopsychological theories help explain why some people come to endorse violent Salafism. Thus, Kundnani says, '[a]t the heart of Sageman's model, then, remains an unexamined assumption that violence has its origins in theology.'[169] Despite his many claims to the contrary, by which he wants to emphasise the role of informal networks, Sageman's analysis is implicitly skewed towards theological analysis.

Kundnani reads Laqueur along these same lines. He identifies Laqueur as an important theoretician of radicalisation, whose later work on radicalisation is an extension of his previous work on religious terrorism. Laqueur wrote a paper in 2004 in which he lays much of the groundwork for a theory of radicalisation, based on his

[167] Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad*, 33
[168] Ibid.
[169] Kundnani, 'Radicalisation', 16.

research on religious terrorism. Laqueur is struggling with the issue of why some individuals resort to terrorism, whereas others, with a similar background or psychology, do not (similar to Sageman's conundrum above). In his reading of Laqueur, Kundnani argues that Laqueur depicts the process of adopting an extreme worldview as facilitated by certain psychological processes 'so that a particular combination of psychological factors and religious beliefs is the best guide to identifying radicalization.'[170] Extremist theology plays a vital role in this regard, which coalesces with psychological processes so that individuals become receptive to the extreme messages of radical religious doctrines. Kundnani further elaborates this move in radicalisation theory:

> Implicit in both the theological and psychological approaches is the notion that the 'new terrorism' of radical Islamism no longer organises itself in formal hierarchies, but instead operates through social networks. Rather than political propaganda recruiting individuals into a group organised with a clear command structure, […] the suggestion is that individuals are radicalised into supporting an 'ideology' as part of an informal social network. This is taken to be a fundamental change; the driver of terrorism becomes a set of ideas shared by an informal social network rather than a coherent organisation.[171]

In other words, ideology remains at the heart of the explanation, although exactly how ideology is circulated is a contested issue in the various models of radicalisation. Radicalisation theories start from the supposition that ideology is the *cause* of radicalisation, by which ideology becomes almost like a 'virus', something that can contaminate individuals, producing radicals, as Kundnani indignantly says. Despite drawing together a wide range of factors, ideology and, particularly, extreme theology remain at the centre of the analysis in radicalisation studies. Per-Erik Nilsson offers a proposition in line with Kundnani's when he writes:

> [R]adicalization is not neutral or objective. With it follows a contingent history, dubious truth claims, and an explicatory model that has be criticized for doing more harm than good. In mainstream approaches to radicalization, the theory of new terrorism has been baked into its ontological and epistemological foundation.[172]

The thesis launched by new terrorism scholars of a peculiar new form of extraordinarily lethal and indiscriminate religious terrorism, separable from secular terror, is

[170] Kundnani, 'Radicalisation', 10.
[171] Kundnani, 'Radicalisation', 10.
[172] Per-Erik Nilsson, *Open Source Jihad: Problematizing the Academic Discourse on Islamic Terrorism in Contemporary Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 47.

carried over from a scientific field[173] into a policy-oriented field of preventing terrorism, particularly Islamic terrorism, in the early stages.

It could be briefly mentioned that this role of religious beliefs in radicalisation has been contested. Several authors could be mentioned here. Let me take here only one emblematic and quite popular example: the work of Olivier Roy. Roy suggests that radicalisation is driven by an intense desire for radicality. For Roy, it is not so much that Islam necessarily has become more radical, but rather, that radicality itself has taken on Islamic forms. He terms this process the *Islamisation of radicalism.*[174] Roy's main concern is with radicality itself, a common phenomenon in youth, particularly after the 1968 student revolts. But if anarchism was a radical alternative to young people in previous generations, as something that distinguished them from their parents, now conservative Salafism provides a radical alternative to 'liberal' or 'secularised' Islam. It is as a radical alternative to commonplace values that radical Islam becomes seductive to young people today, according to Roy. Islam must thus be understood within a context of secularisation and laicism, which have marginalised religion to the extent that it tends to take the form of fundamentalism. Religious citizens (at least in France, about which Roy is writing) often come to see and present themselves as underdogs in a sense. Radical Islamic demagogues and propagandists know how to mobilise these sentiments, and they do this by giving radical Islam an aura of heroism and providing it with an aesthetic of violence. In this sense, radical Islam has much in common with previous youth revolts, Roy says.

Roy further suggests that radical Islam, despite being construed as nostalgic, does not directly follow the path of Salafism. Although there are many forms of Salafism, these are united in that they 'believe that by strictly following the rules and guidance in the Koran and Sunna (path or example of the Prophet Muhammad) they eliminate the biases of human subjectivity and self-interest, thereby allowing them to identify the singular truth of God's commands'.[175] However, contemporary radical Islam cannot easily be placed into any of the categories of Salafism. In fact, Roy says, the religiosity endorsed by IS radicals deviates from traditional Salafism in that they do not follow strict daily routines, they do not cherish their parents in the same way as Salafists do, and they treat enemies and slaves in ways that Salafists don't. In some

[173] However, as Stampnitzy has shown, terrorism studies cannot in any direct way be classified as a scientific field. In her work, she argues that terrorism studies were formed in close relation with governmental agencies and with a highly pragmatic and normative agenda. See Lisa Stampnitzky, *Disciplining Terror*. See also Lisa Stampnitzky, 'Disciplining an Unruly Field: Terrorism Experts and Theories of Scientific/Intellectual Production,' *Qualitative Sociology* 34, no. 1 (2011): 1–19, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11133-010-9187-4.

[174] Olivier Roy, *Jihad och döden* [*Le Djihad et la mort*], trans. Johan Öberg (Göteborg: Bokförlaget Daidalos, 2016), 14–15.

[175] Wiktorowicz, 'Anatomy of the Salafi Movement', 207.

ways, IS ideology is even modern: 'In reality, IS ideology has integrated a degree of autonomy for women and a "modern" relation to sexuality in its perverse forms,'[176] Roy says. The argument in Roy is that to a certain degree, although their tone may be nostalgic, these radicals by no means opt for traditionalistic Islam: they are *modern* fundamentalists, who in certain respects have more in common with radical anarchists than with the apolitical so-called purist Salafists.[177]

Roy presents an interesting picture of radicalisation. But when it comes to policy and political programmes, it seems that the assumptions forged in the discourse on new terrorism have permeated policy more thoroughly. It can thus be inferred from this discussion that the work to prevent radicalisation is implicitly (or explicitly) linked to a specific idea of Islam and religion as a cause of radicalisation, which is further incorporated into social work and related professions via policy.

Violent Extremism, Democracy and Antidemocratic Ideologies

In addition to the concept radicalisation, another term that has emerged with particular force in counter-terrorism is *violent extremism*. This term represents an attempt to broaden the scope of preventative work by including secular ideologies. It has received significant attention and is now being used in policy, where it has to some extent superseded the term 'radicalisation' in the sense that much of the work to prevent terrorism is now termed work to prevent violent extremism. In Sweden, for example, the coordinator of the work to prevent radicalisation and extremism has been called the *national coordinator against violent extremism*.[178] This section elaborates on and clarifies what the term means in contemporary policy and practice.

The term 'extremism' emerged principally in German political sociology, where it was often oriented towards analyses and classifications of political parties whose common factor was that they were against democracy. In these early studies, it was their opposition to democracy that was thought to be the main element unifying extreme parties.[179] Although the term has gained slightly different connotations now, the emphasis on opposition to democracy still prevails. Here are two examples of how violent extremism is defined in Swedish policy:

> The most frequent operational definition of violence-affirming extremism refers to

[176] Roy, *Jihad och döden*, 95, my translation.

[177] See Wiktorowicz, 'Anatomy of the Salafi Movement', for a detailed description of purist Salafism.

[178] The Swedish national coordinator was appointed by the Swedish government in 2014 with the goal of working with and developing knowledge of radicalisation and violent extremism. In 2018, the function was transferred to the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention [Brå, Brottsförebyggande rådet].

[179] Adrienne Sörbom and Magnus Wennerhag, '"Begreppet extremism – en kritisk introduktion", i Det vita fältet III. Samtida forskning om högerextremism, specialnummer av Arkiv', *Tidskrift för samhällsanalys* 5 (2016): 15–37, https://doi.org/10.13068/2000-6217.

> actions that support, requestion or entail participation in ideologically sanctioned acts of violence in order to support a cause. […] Violence-affirming extremism composes, together with other phenomena such as organised crime and social unrest, a salient and growing threat towards open and democratic society.[180]
>
> Violence-affirming extremism is an umbrella term for movements, ideologies or environments that do not accept a democratic societal order, and which promote violence in order to achieve an ideological goal.[181]

We can note that the term used in Sweden is 'violence-affirming extremism', which reflects an even broader scope of interest than merely those movements that are conducting violent acts. Even non-violent movements that to some degree adhere to a violent ideology or can be linked to and be said to support violent ideologies are of interest and become the object of scrutiny. This means that not only violent acts but also violent rhetoric become of interest to practitioners.

Although there seems to be a consensus regarding the usefulness of the term in policymaking, the value of the term for scientific enquiries remains a contested issue. This because the term is intrinsically normative and 'has the purpose of marking the limits on what can be accepted within the current governmental regime',[182] as Helene Lööv phrases it. Adrienne Sörbom and Magnus Wennerhag similarly write that the concept is grounded in normative as related to political deviations, which makes the term less useful to scientific inquiry 'as it treats these deviations as a given without offering any explanations to why they occur or what role they play in modern societies.'[183] Despite the critique of its usefulness (or lack thereof) in scientific contexts, the term 'extremism' is frequently used in government reports,[184] as well as in practical social work.

There is an important linkage between the terms 'radicalisation' and 'extremism'. For instance, as described by Peter Neumann, radicalisation is 'the process whereby people become extremists'.[185] On this argument, extremism is the end result of radicalisation. As argued above, radicalisation, in its contemporary usage, has deep ties to the post-9/11 War on Terror and often implicitly refers to the process of adopting

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[180] Christofer Edling and Amir Rostami, 'Inledning,' in SOU 2017-67, 'Våldsbejakande extremism – En forskarantologi,' (Stockholm: Statens Offentliga Utredningar, 2017), 15, my translation.
[181] Socialstyrelsen 2016-5-2, 'Våldsbejakande extremism: Stöd för socialtjänstens arbete med barn och unga vuxna' (Socialstyrelsen, 2016), 8, my translation.
[182] Heléne Lööv, Våldsbejakande extremism – Begrepp och diskurs, in SOU 2017-67, 'Våldsbejakande extremism – En forskarantologi (Stockholm: Statens Offentliga Utredningar, 2017), 21, my translation.
[183] Sörbom and Wennerhag, 'Begreppet extremism', 17, my translation.
[184] See; Kulturdepartmentet, 'Värna demokratin mot våldsbejakande extremism Nationell samordning och kommunernas ansvar' (SOU 2016-92), (Statens Offentliga Utredningar, 2016); Socialstyrelsen 2016-5-2, 'Våldsbejakande extremism.
[185] Peter R. Neumann, 'The Trouble with Radicalization,' *International Affairs* 89, no. 4 (2013): 873–93, https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12049.

radical Islamic teachings. But if radicalisation is implicitly skewed towards Islamic radicalisation, extremism is an attempt to broaden the scope somewhat and include a wider range of ideologies, groups and movements. Richards suggests that while radicalisation referred to Islamic violence in particular, the term 'extremism' encompasses right-wing forms of extremism as well, all of which are a matter of public safety.[186]

The term has thus been used as a way to open up the way for more terrorists and ideological traditions to be included in the work than merely jihadists. 'Extremism' is an umbrella term for ideologies and worldviews that in some way endorse violence or are antidemocratic. Sörbom and Wennerhag explain its meaning in a Swedish context:

> In official Swedish debate, the term 'extremism' seems to have become commonplace lately. When the term is used, it is to describe domestic conditions, mostly groups of activists with their ideological home in Nazi, fascist or nationalist ideas, radical Islam or different variants of anarchism, autonomism and communism. In addition to descriptions of ideology, 'extremism' is also used to depict activist groups who use violent (and other illegal) methods to achieve their goals. Frequently it is the same groups that are mentioned, regardless of whether 'extremism' is seen as an expression of the group's ideology or their choice of methods.[187]

In the account given by Sörbom and Wennerhag, we see two different forms of extremism. On the one hand, extremism has to do with extreme ideas. However, in policy, it seems to be not just any extreme idea that is of interest. What is meant when talking about extremism is usually anarchism and communism, radical Islam and Nazism/fascism. That is to say, certain ideologies are identified a priori as being immanently violent, or at least as particularly prone to becoming violent. To be extreme does not mean to have an uncompromising belief in the free market, in democracy or something similar.[188] 'Extremism', as it is used in policy, is more specific, referring to precise ideologies identified in advance.

The term has another use, however, with reference to extreme methods. On this definition, extremism is adopting violent or otherwise illegal methods to achieve a specific political goal. The problem of properly distinguishing between extreme methods and extreme ideologies has been a recurring one for much of the research and

[186] Anthony Richards, 'From Terrorism to "Radicalization" to "Extremism": Counterterrorism Imperative or Loss of Focus?,' *International Affairs* 91, no. 2 (2015): 374, http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12240.
[187] Sörbom and Wennerhag, 'Begreppet extremism,' 15, my translation.
[188] For an elaboration of this argument, see Magnus Weber, 'Radikalisering och övertygelse: den radikala demokratin,' in *Den förnekade kunskapen: En introduktion till Robert Pfallers filosofi*, ed. Sverker Lundin and Tobias Wessely (Hägersten: Tankekraft förlag, 2019), 281–314.

policy discussion concerning terrorism, radicalisation and extremism.[189] But the hazardous effect of confusing method and ideology is not only that it is difficult to distinguish various forms of extremism. More importantly, as alluded to above by Sörbom and Wennerhag, the problem is that violence is being ontologised. Violence is regarded as immanent in some ideologies and anathema to other ideologies such as liberal democracy, despite the many evidences to the contrary. The War on Terror is perhaps the most recent and extreme example of how democracy takes on violent forms. This means that the search for extremism does not always mean an open search for violent movements or rhetoric instigating violence; it more often means a search for anarchic, right-wing and Islamic extremists.

In policy programmes such as the Prevent programme and the Contest programme in Britain, which had direct implications for social work practice, non-violent extreme ideologies are linked to terrorism by the view that certain non-violent ideologies are conducive to terrorism; they are the soil from which extremism can grow, despite being non-violent in themselves.[190] This usage of the term and the amalgamation of non-violent ideologies and terrorism has been critiqued by terrorism scholars. Although, as we can recall, there is a lack of scholarly consensus about what constitutes terrorism, many scholars argue that terrorism is a method, not a system of beliefs. Richards says that despite the fact that violence has been conducted in the name of certain (nationalist, right-wing etc.) ideologies, violence is not intrinsic to them.[191] Richards thereby draws attention to the problems of ontologising violence, making it a constituent of specific ideologies just because terrorism and violence have been performed in the name of this particular ideology. Again, the same is not done with liberal democracy, despite an abundance of examples of violence in the name of democracy.

Richards elaborates on the problem caused by a confusion of methods and ideologies by stating that linking non-violent ideologies to terrorism alienates those parts of a movement who are in fact non-violent. These tend to be depicted as part of the problem when in fact, they could be 'important and effective allies in countering what counter-terrorism should really be concerned with: countering terrorism'.[192] The problem is not only that some citizens become alienated or that there is a risk of misrecognising some citizens as a risk factor in radicalisation when in fact they could

[189] See Neumann, 'The Trouble'; Richards, 'From Terrorism'; Sörbom and Wennerhag, 'Begreppet extremism.'
[190] Richards, 'From Terrorism.'
[191] Richards, 'From Terrorism,' 375.
[192] Richards, 'From Terrorism,' 372.

be seen as a bulwark against it. Richards goes even further than that in his critique by stating that

> There is a danger, however, that, in suggesting that there is some kind of intrinsic link between certain non-violent dogmas and terrorism, a threshold has been crossed: that large sections of the population who exercise their democratic right to hold such views, however unpalatable they may be, will become further alienated as part of the 'terrorist problem', when in fact they might have no truck with the use of violence; and that we exclude them as potential dissuaders against those who would resort to terrorism. The concern is that counterterrorism, rather than focusing on the threat from terrorism, *has itself become increasingly ideological*—that it has gone beyond the remit of countering terrorism and has ventured into the broader realm of tackling ideological threats to the state.[193]

Drawing links between non-violent and violent actors in this way may, by conclusion, directly violate the democratic right to freedom of thought and speech. Working to prevent extremism always risks becoming a witch hunt for dissenters, even though the forms of dissent may lie perfectly within the confines of democracy.

From this critical discussion of the term 'extremism', it can be deduced that despite attempts to broaden the work and go beyond the somewhat parochial formulation of radicalisation as Islamic radicalisation, policy and research on extremism still rely rather heavily on a priori identifications of violent ideologies, amongst them radical Islam. Religion has thus come to be more visible in social work through the concepts of violent extremism and radicalisation.

[193] Richards, 'From Terrorism,' 380.

Violent Extremism and Radicalisation in Social Work

The terms 'extremism' and 'radicalisation' have opened the way for new actors such as social workers to work preventatively with terrorism and related problems. These are not merely new terms, they also point to a shift from terror organisations to terrorists in-becoming. As Claudia Aradau and Rens van Munster write, this shift in scope – from terrorists to future terrorists – takes the form of a *governmentality of the future* by which the 'rationality of zero risk makes those considered potentially dangerous *a priori* responsible, subjected to administrative measures that are now equivalent to juridical sanctions'.[194] A turn towards pre-emptive logics also means that a whole new range of actors are identified as potentially able to contribute to counter-terrorism.[195] What was previously the sole responsibility of security agencies and the police now becomes the responsibility of a wide range of actors who may come into contact with these soon-to-become terrorists. Social workers, teachers, youth leaders, religious leaders and many others are actualised in this regard.

An important rhetorical move that justifies the involvement of social workers and others in counter-extremism is that terrorism and radicalism, or threats to national security more broadly, are now being linked to vulnerability and marginalisation. We could see this in the above sections on radicalisation, where poverty, marginalisation, and generally being vulnerable and at risk are regarded as causes of radicalisation. Put differently, the discourses on radicalisation and extremism fuse notions of being at risk with being risky, which brings in certain actors whose principal obligations are to prevent poverty or marginalisation, and among these actors are social workers. Aradau's comment in her analysis of human trafficking is also applicable to radicalisation: 'For the rationality of risk management, the "discovery" of the victims' past traumas and abuse becomes an indicator of future risk.'[196] Past traumas, structural inequalities and similar factors have come to be seen as the main cause of radicalisation,[197] which means that preventing inequalities simultaneously becomes a way to

[194] Claudia Aradau and Rens van Munster, 'Governing Terrorism Through Risk: Taking Precautions, (Un)knowing the Future,' *European Journal of International Relations* 13, no. 1 (2007): 30, https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066107074290.

[195] For an analysis of Swedish policy, and for an argument that radicalisation/extremism practices tend to emphasise risk and pre-emption, see Robin Andersson Malmros and Christer Mattsson, 'Från ord till handlingsplan: en rapport om kommunala handlingsplaner mot våldsbejakande extremism' (Sveriges Kommuner och Landsting, 2017).

[196] Claudia Aradau, 'The Perverse Politics of Four-Letter Words: Risk and Pity in the Securitisation of Human Trafficking,' *Millennium* 33, no. 2 (2004): 276, https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298040330020101.

[197] For a critical discussion on how vulnerability is being linked to radicalisation, see Coppock and McGovern, 'Dangerous Minds.'; Charlotte Heath-Kelly, 'Counter-Terrorism and the Counterfactual: Producing the "Radicalisation" Discourse and the UK Prevent Strategy', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 15 (2013): 394–415. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-856X.2011.00489.x; Jonathan Githens-Mazer, 'The Rhetoric and Reality: Radicalization and Political Discourse,' *International Political Science Review* 33, no. 5 (2012): 556–567. https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512112454416

counter terrorism. It is within this shift that social work finds an arena, I suggest. Caring professions are thus increasingly involved in counter-extremism and have come to play a vital role in preventing extremism.[198] Herz says that although social work and related professions are often portrayed as adopting a 'soft' or non-policing approach to social problems, and accordingly criticised for not taking these issues seriously, social workers are given a salient position in policy when it comes to extremism.[199]

Herz himself is reluctant to adopt a securitising logic within social work, something that is often favoured in policy. He argues that rather than adopting a security rationale, social work should do what it does best, which is to work more openly with inequalities, not with policing of thought. Similarly, Mattson suggests that counter-extremism provides a case of a profound blurring of the lines between care work and security work.[200] Despite these critique, however, social work is increasingly becoming involved in matters concerning extremism. It is often argued that the social services are involved with extremism relatively frequently, both by coming into contact with individuals and by community building, which makes the social services a pertinent actor in work to counter extremism.[201] It is further suggested in policy that the social services are responsible for working with a range of issues also relevant to extremism, such as poverty, criminality, violence and substance abuse, and so also places extremism within the boundaries of social work and the social services.[202] We can also see this attitude in a report from Andersson Malmros and Mattsson. In their analysis of Swedish policy, Andersson Malmros and Mattsson notice that the so-called frontline practitioners, who are teachers, social workers and leisure workers, are those who most frequently come into contact with extremism in their work. The reason is that they often work with the group that is most frequently mentioned in the work: children and young people.[203]

In all these arguments, social work is identified as already implicated in the work against extremism and it is assumed that social workers are well-suited to do this

[198] Jo Finch, Jessica H. Jönsson, Masoud Kamali and David McKendrick, 'Social Work and Countering Violent Extremism in Sweden and the UK,' *European Journal of Social Work* (2019): 1–12, https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2019.1657803.
[199] Marcus Herz, *Rapport 1: Socialt arbete, pedagogik och arbetet mot så kallad våldsbejakande extremism* (Göteborg: Segerstedtinstitutet, 2016).
[200] Christer Mattsson, 'Caught Between the Urgent and the Comprehensible: Professionals' Understanding of Violent Extremism,' *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 11, no. 1 (2018): 111–129, https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2017.1337327.
[201] Sara Johansson, 'Socialt arbete och våldsbejakande extremism,' in SOU 2017-67, 'Våldsbejakande extremism – En forskarantologi' (Stockholm: Statens Offentliga Utredningar, 2017), 257–90.
[202] SOU 2016-5-2, 'Våldsbejakande extremism - Stöd för socialtjänstens arbete med barn och unga vuxna', Socialstyrelsen, 2016; Kulturdepartmentet, 'Värna demokratin mot våldsbejakande extremism Nationell samordning och kommunernas ansvar' (SOU 2016-92), (Statens Offentliga Utredningar, 2016).
[203] Andersson Malmros and Mattsson, Från ord till handlingsplan, 5, my translation.

task because of their knowledge and experience of working with marginalisation, poverty and inequalities.

In a critical note concerning how young people and children are identified as a locus of potential radicalisation, Coppock and McGovern argue that in the case of Britain,

> by essentialised and racialised constructions of 'childhood vulnerability' and bolstered by pseudo-scientific 'psychology of radicalisation' discourse, education and welfare agencies are now strategically positioned at the forefront of the late 'war on terror' ─ recruited to institute normalising technologies that serve to reconstruct the Muslim child's 'self' in line with the interests of the state. In this, children and young people's services practitioners are given a central role in 'soft' policing and disciplining British Muslim children and young people.[204]

In their work with young people and children, the social services are thought to encounter radicalisation and, in order to safeguard these children, they should work preventatively against radicalisation. Coppock and McGovern point out that this assumption makes this discourse difficult to criticise, since everything is done in the name of the children's welfare.

What about religion in social work then? It can be argued that the turn towards extremism and radicalisation in social work is also central to how religion is increasingly being understood and managed in social work. While practitioners may work with right-wing and left-wing extremism, the work is shaped principally by a concern for Islamic extremism, both in Sweden and in the UK, say Finch et al.[205] The identification of social work as a potential counter-extremism actor is simultaneously an argument for how social work needs to better understand and work with religion. Mattson similarly suggests that although right-wing and left-wing extremism have been worked with for many years, it was the recruitment to violent Islamic movements that sparked intense work and forced authorities to act.[206] As such, religion has come to be a constituent of the social work profession and this development has actualised a concern with and need for a knowledge of religion.

The implication for practice is that social work has become entangled with colonial discourse and perpetuates ideas about what religion is, and what it is not. According to Finch et al., radicalisation and extremism actualise discourses on religion that are by no means new but are a continuation of a colonial discourse. On this logic, social work draws on 'imperialist and colonial ideas that have at their core a belief in the supremacy and centrality of a Western centric doctrine that is suspicious of any other

[204] Coppock and McGovern, 'Dangerous Minds,' 252.
[205] Finch et al., 'Social Work and Countering Violent Extremism in Sweden and the UK,' 2.
[206] Mattsson, 'Caught Between the Urgent and the Comprehensible,' 112.

explanatory narratives that surround terrorism, racial violence or extremism'.[207] As such, counter-extremism continues to operate with a vision of a backwards and irrational Islam in contrast to rational Western modernity.

In another account, the discourse on radicalisation is seen to actualise a concern with religion that further motivates social workers to develop and refine their understanding and knowledge of religion. Robinson et al. suggest that the issue of radicalisation as well as negative views on Islam demand that social work needs to take Islam seriously, and that 'in the face of negative narratives about Muslims and their communities, a general lack of knowledge of Islam, and increasing discrimination presents a challenge for social work'.[208] Social workers need to avoid biased assumptions about Islam, an issue that has become particularly acute through the emphasis on Islam in radicalisation after 9/11. Stereotypes and generalisations about Islam are a threat to productive social work when it comes to a Muslim population. According to Robinson et al., rather than being excluded, imams and Islamic civil society should be more integrated in the work. Knowledge of religion could address the negative and stereotypical understandings of Islam seen above.

However, just because policy portrays religion and work with extremism in a specific way does not mean that practitioners always adopt and adhere to this picture. Social workers are not mere puppets in a colonialist structure; they have agency and can work against or beyond such formulations. As Mattsson has shown, practitioners tend to adopt a marginalisation perspective when working to prevent Islamic radicalisation, meaning that there is a gap between how practitioners see their own work and how it is spelled out in policy. Although policy specifies how one ought to work with religion, practitioners draw on other discourses as well, which become counter-narratives or resistance of sorts. There is thus a gap between policy formulations and the way practitioners sometimes operate, where they draw particularly on discourses of segregation rather than on formulaic descriptions of radical Islam. Practitioners always have to make sense of this gap between experience and tacit knowledge on the one hand, and policy formulations that exceptionalise religion on the other. However, writes Mattsson:

> At the end of the day, [practitioners] have to perform in accordance with their political mission and the heated media debate. This results in rather short-range

[207] Finch et al., 'Social Work and Countering Violent Extremism in Sweden and the UK,' 7.
[208] Lena Robinson, Rafik Gardee, Farkhanda Chaudhry and Hannah Collins, 'Muslim Youth in Britain: Acculturation, Radicalization, and Implications for Social Work Practice/Training,' *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work*: *Social Thought* 36, no. 1–2 (2017): 278, https://doi.org/10.1080/15426432.2017.1311244.

> educational activities where participants learn about Daesh symbols and propaganda, which is quite a far cry from acquiring knowledge about the segregated society.[209]

In education for social work practitioners and the like, the exceptionalisation of religion seems to prevail. That is, despite the gap between policy and practice, and despite the agency of practitioners to act differently, ideas about religion resolutely come to permeate social work through counter-extremism, although practitioners try to downplay religion as a cause or factor in their work.

The account provided in this chapter shows that the idea that contemporary terrorism is particularly violent and indiscriminate due to its roots in religious and sacred discourse has been conceived of and launched from within a strand in terrorism studies. It follows that religion is sometimes portrayed as anathema to liberal democracy by having, at its roots, a tendency towards indiscriminate violence. This idea has been carried over into policy through the terms 'radicalisation' and 'violent extremism', which in turn have actualised a complete set of new actors such as teachers, social workers and youth leaders, making them suitable for counter-terrorism. As for social work, religion has entered the field of social work through these terms and their related practices. In the next four chapters, I shall discuss in more detail exactly what the implications have been for how religion is conceptualised in work to prevent extremism and promote democracy, as well as try to find a way forward, towards a more constructive and productive understanding of religion than the one identified here.

[209] Mattsson, 'Caught Between the Urgent and the Comprehensible,' 126.

3. DOCTRINES: AN ALTERNATIVE TO INTELLECTUALISM

Introducing the Four Themes

This and the following three chapters comprise the main part of the analysis in this dissertation. It is here that I introduce and discuss the four themes of the dissertation empirically and theoretically. Before elaborating on the structure of the analysis, a clarification is in order. In the analysis that follows I focus on the way the practitioners I interviewed talk about, understand and work with religion as a component of their broader work to prevent extremism and promote democracy. My intention is not to provide a complete account of the work they are doing to prevent extremism. Further, I am in no way suggesting that the interviewees who participated in this study believe that religion is the sole or even the most important factor in extremism. Many note that religion is merely one factor among many when it comes to why people join radical movements. Politics, a thirst for adventure, economic factors, and other issues were mentioned as factors contributing to extremism. But at the same time, they frequently work with religion and religious ideas and involve experts in theological and religious matters in their work.

The genealogical analysis undertaken here is intended to problematise and go beyond the assumptions and preconceptions related to religion that I identify in the interview material. It should be stressed that I do not intend to criticise the interviewees' views and practices. What I set out to do is to analyse and investigate how the views of religion expressed by the interviewees came to be taken for granted, how they came to form the current episteme of religion. This task is critical and constructive, albeit not in the sense of criticising the interviewees. What is intended is a critical scrutiny of preconceptions, using literature on theological and philosophical history so as to be in a position to work out an alternative vision. Practically, a critical scrutiny

and an excursion into history has the advantage of providing a possible way out of the impasses or tensions about which some of the interviewees, in my interpretation at least, also express concern.

Let me now describe the structure of the analysis. All chapters follow much the same logic. I begin each chapter with an analysis of my interview material. A specific theme is identified in relation to how religion is being conceptualised, understood and intervened in within projects and practices intended to promote democracy and tolerance and prevent extremism. I then analyse practices and statements in which taken-for-granted ideas and preconceptions about religion are embedded. The analyses of the interview material follow the discourse analytical framework described in the introduction. Following the empirical analysis, in which I have investigated tacit assumptions about what religion is (in some cases by stating what it is not), I work genealogically with literature on theological and philosophical history in order to open up and unpack these assumptions. History enables me to denaturalise that which is taken for granted in the material. Literature on theological and philosophical history thus functions as a critical dialogue partner, one that allows me to distance myself from the present and explore new ways of conceptualising the religious. In other words, history is a way to provide a 'de-inevitabilization of the present, so that "the things which seem most evident to us" are recognized as contingent, "always formed in the confluence of encounters and chances, during the course of a precarious and fragile history"', to quote Michel Foucault.[210]

After having denaturalised the preconceptions in the interview material via genealogical analyses, the remainder of each chapter is devoted to working out an alternative position by placing certainties in parentheses, so to speak. The critical examination of a particular vision of the religious allows a rethinking. I have drawn principally on philosophical and theological research in working out an alternative position, one that can be more productive and fruitful when it comes to social work and its future dealings with the religious.

The four themes considered in these chapters are (1) teachings, (2) the act of belief, (3) freedom and (4) religious language. All four of these themes relate to the main purpose of the dissertation in that they all contribute to a complex and broad picture of how religion is made into an object of knowledge and intervention in regard to the prevention of radicalisation or the promotion of democracy. Moreover, each of the four themes is linked to a secularist understanding of religion. Teachings have become central in modern theories of religion (chapter 3), in the same way as inner emotions

[210] Foucault quoted in Carol Bacchi and Susan Goodwin, *Poststructural Policy Analysis: A Guide to Practice* (New York: Palgrave Pivot, 2016), 46.

have come to be understood as the main cause of religious behaviours and acts of belief (chapter 4). Freedom is a hallmark of modern secularist theories of religion, but not any kind of freedom; it is a specific form of freedom that we can call autonomy or freedom of choice (chapter 5). Finally, religious language and religious traditions are often, in secularist rhetoric, linked to gender inequalities, war and violence (chapter 6). What binds the four themes together is that they all are deeply related to secularist ideologies.

As suggested in the introduction, secularist theories of religion derive their rationale from a secularist relegation of religion to the private sphere in an attempt to make religion politically impotent. Religion, in all of the four themes, emerges as potentially politically irrelevant and essentially a private, emotional experience. It is portrayed as a choice that has more to do with personal inclinations than a way of life. Although this subjectivist interpretation may seem like an open and flexible approach to the religious, my argument here is that practitioners tacitly draw upon a modern, specifically Western/Protestant/liberal vision of the religious. This vision of the religious is normative rather than descriptive. If we accept the claim made by poststructuralists that language is performative, as Judith Butler famously proclaimed,[211] then privileging such a view of the religious may have direct political, not to say practical, implications.

The conclusion drawn from the discursive and genealogical analysis is that there are some limitations in modernist theories of religion that are potentially unproductive for social work. The proposition or alternative that emerges from the analysis is that if we are to understand religion in all its complexity, we should move from a methodological or even metaphysical individualism by which religion in its essence is treated as idiosyncratic preferences to a view of religion as contextually adapted and developed. That would include a vision of human beings as essentially interdependent and social. Religion, according to this view, is less an individual choice and more a way to make sense of the world, to live in a world that is to some extent always already meaningful, before and beyond individual choice. Thus what also binds these four themes together is that they all provide examples of the shortcomings of treating religion as fundamentally individual. These shortcomings can be resolved by conceiving religious doctrines, emotions and free choice as produced, interpreted and shaped within a broader lifeworld context. By emphasising lived experience, religion emerges as plastic and context-dependent rather than as timeless and rigid systematisations.

[211] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London/New York: Routledge, 2006).

What is proposed is a move away from an individualistic understanding of religion towards an understanding of religion conceived in terms of a *lifeworld*.

On Doctrines

This chapter deals with the first of the four themes, namely the way doctrines and teachings in religion relate to the religious disposition of the believer. Doctrines are in some cases an important element in religion, often together with spiritual beliefs and experiences, communal forms of organisation (ecclesiology) and religious behaviours. This chapter elucidates how secularist or modern theories of religion have come to emphasise doctrinal elements in religion at the expense of lived and practised elements. Secularism tends to reduce religion to its doctrines and give to these doctrines an intellectualist ring.[212] This vision of religion as fundamentally a set of propositions is bound up with a scientific turn in biblical discourse as well as with comparative religious studies, by which religion is formulated as comparable doctrinal systems.[213]

This secularist intellectualisation of religion resonates in the interview material presented in this chapter, in which a strategy directed at disproving teachings via religious expertise is identified. With the help of experts, practitioners work out counter-arguments to extremist ideas and teachings, often by stating that these are uncommon and marginalised in a specific religious tradition. It is believed (or at least the rationale for the work gives credence to the idea) that if it can be shown that religious doctrines rest upon a shaky foundation, the individual believer may renounce their extremist beliefs. This approach reveals taken-for-granted or tacit assumptions about the religious in terms of which a religious disposition is seen as hinging on or resting solely upon intellectual content – doctrines as propositions – so that to change a religious disposition one should attack or try to change doctrines.

The investigation of the history of secularism and the preconditions of an intellectualist interpretation of religion reveals a few practical limitations with such a vision of the religious. To open up and broaden the discussion, a theoretical position of conceiving doctrines not as intellectual propositions but as *frameworks* is invoked and discussed. On this view, teachings allow the individual believer to familiarise themselves with a religious culture or tradition; they stabilise a religious culture, making it coherent and transhistorically stringent, although also contextually dependent and

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[212] Ola Sigurdson, *Heavenly Bodies: Incarnation, the Gaze, and Embodiment in Christian Theology*, trans. Carl Olsen (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdman's Publishing Company, 2016), 38

[213] Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1974); Peter Harrison, *'Religion' and the Religions in the English Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

flexible. Teachings are more than simply statements about reality; they also relate to morality, what it means to be a human being, a believer, and they provide ways of resolving moral/ethical/religious dilemmas and teach how to live. Some aspects or elements of teachings thus evade direct verification and falsification.

It is proposed in this chapter that if social workers are to understand the complex issue of religion, they need to have a more refined understanding of teachings without resorting to a drastically intellectualist conception of it. Teachings have as much to do with practice as with theory, as much with ethics and morality as with ontology. Teachings are embodied, practised, lived; they are not merely theoretical reflections or propositions. Without these nuances in mind, practitioners risk turning a fascination with perilous doctrines into a quest for religious purity. Social work then assumes the peculiar position of sorting out incorrect doctrines. That amounts to a confrontational practice, one that is likely to be anything but productive since it may fuel polarisation and paint religious citizens into a corner where they feel they must defend their worldview. In other words, the risk is that confrontational social work entrenches rather than pulverises such doctrines and teachings.

Preventing Extremism: Theology as Counter-narratives

In the work to prevent radicalisation and promote democracy and tolerance in the interview material in this study, a salient strategy can be noticed: practitioners try to disprove and find counter-narratives to what are identified as radical/perilous doctrines. This way of working with doctrines is also linked to the broader discourse on radicalisation. In its broadest terms, the radicalisation process is often defined as an internalisation of extreme doctrines and an adoption of the propaganda of the extremist movements. Radicalisation theories in general can thus be said to be skewed towards a fascination with the more systematic and intellectualist elements of a religion or an ideology. Kundnani states that counter-extremism formulates ideologies as a kind of *virus* that contaminates extremists.[214] The implication is that practitioners identify a need for a better, sounder knowledge of religious doctrines, teachings and religious behaviour. They often seek this knowledge in their relations with external experts on religion.

The issue of expertise, however, is not exclusive to the work I have studied here. Social work, like many other professions, is increasingly involving experts in its work.

[214] Arun Kundnani, 'Radicalisation: The Journey of a Concept', *Race & Class* 54, no. 2 (2017): 3–25, https://doi.org/10.1177/0306396812454984.

Along with the contemporary emphasis on evidence-based practice in social work[215] comes an increased salience of research, by which professional judgement is downplayed in favour of scientifically robust methods and models. The ability to operate between rules and guidelines, an indispensable skill of social workers and other professionals (e.g., teachers) to avoid an over-deterministic use of formalisations, is now beginning to crumble.[216] The implication, as many have pointed out before me, is a kind of truncated social work. What is of the essence in this analysis is that new experts are invited to the scene, identified as having particularly useful knowledge that is indispensable to practitioners. New social problems such as violent extremism, honour violence or female circumcision, all identified as at least partly religious problems, (are said to) create a need and thirst for knowledge of a religious and theological nature.

One of the most important insights from the sociology of scientific knowledge (SSK) is that knowledge is never transferred from one sphere to another; knowledge is negotiated, formed and shaped within a specific pragmatic context.[217] Experts do not merely transfer scientific data or big theoretical ideas, but become mediators who work with 'ideas which are going to make a difference, and especially ideas which are 'vehicular' rather than "oracular",' as Osborne phrases it.[218] So when entering the field, experts need to reformulate their knowledge and expertise into something useful for practitioners. One of the interviewees, Mark, is an academic expert. He expresses this dilemma by stating that 'when meeting practitioners, the difference compared to the academy is that [practitioners] say, "Well, that was a really interesting theoretical exposition, but what do we do now?" So, you have to adapt to their level of abstraction. And that is a challenge in these situations.' Similarly, Noel, an academic researcher in Islamic philosophy who has served as a consultant and lecturer for practitioners, tells me that 'the question that I feel is the most frustrating for [practitioners] is: What to do? […] They want some kind of know-how, tips. How do you do it? How do you identify an extremist?' Thus, as predicted by sociologists of science, scientific knowledge is reformulated in the process of entering the field of

[215] See Marcus Lauri, 'Narratives of Governing: Rationalization, Responsibility and Resistance in Social Work' (PhD diss., Umeå University, 2016).
[216] See Michael Lipsky, *Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services* (New York: Russel Sage Foundation, 2010); Anders Molander, *Discretion in the Welfare State: Social Rights and Professional Judgement* (New York: Routledge, 2016); Jonna Bornemark, *Horisonten finns alltid kvar: Om det bortglömda omdömet* (Stockholm: Volante, 2020).
[217] See Sheila Jasanoff, *The Fifth Branch: Science Advisors as Policymakers* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1990).
[218] Thomas Osborne, 'On mediators: Intellectuals and the ideas trade in the knowledge society,' *Economy and Society* 33, no. 4 (2004): 441, https://doi.org/10.1080/0308514042000285224.

practice.[219] In this case, the knowledge coming out of these encounters between practitioners and experts is counter-narratives or counter-doctrines, used by practitioners to debunk extremist ideology.

In the material analysed here, the practices and statements concerning the use of theology or knowledge about religion to provide counter-narratives to extremist positions hold tacit assumptions about religion. Below are a few examples of how practitioners talk about and work with religion that throw light on this theme and explicate the way religion is conceptualised. According to my analysis, the practices analysed here could, in a broader context, be construed as an intellectualist or propositionalist conceptualisation of religion. As a first illustration of this, consider the following quotation from John, a practitioner who has worked with conflict resolution and prevention of extremism. When we were talking about the role experts on religion have in this work, he said:

> Of course there are lots of young people that get, you know, become radicalized because of misinterpretation of their religion. That's a given and we have seen it all through human history. Different groups at different times, depending on their needs or wants […] with religion as an opium to get people to do what they want. And it's not different from this case either. And of course when people get radicalized, radicalized because of religion, then I think it's also logical that we use theological interpretations […] to de-radicalize them. I think that's necessary.

An implicit view of religion emerges if we consider the use of words here: he says that you can get radicalised because of misinterpretations. It is the interpretation itself that seems to be the issue, the motor of the radicalisation process. Moreover, he makes an important distinction between interpretation and *mis*interpretation. There seems to be correct ways to interpret doctrine, as well as false or incorrect ones.

It is in this regard that experts on religious doctrines become relevant and vital to practitioners: experts can point out to practitioners (or directly to clients) which interpretations are correct and which are incorrect. Having this knowledge is thought to be useful as a way to persuade the extremist to abandon their incorrect worldviews and doctrines and adopt correct ones. John elaborated on this theme:

> This is not actually what [the doctrine] meant. Try to really understand the deep meanings. If you go to some of the, some of the southern states in the United States … You know some interpretations of the Bible, which are *wrong*. The same thing is happening here, you know, interpretations of the Koran that are actually incorrect. So, you need someone with a deeper understanding of the theological.

[219] See also Magnus Weber, 'The Acerbity of the Social: How to Include the Social in Governmental Risk Assessments,' *Journal of Risk Research* 21, no. 7 (2018): 914–31, https://doi.org/10.1080/13669877.2016.1264449.

Ideas of what religion is, the essence of religion in a sense, lurk beneath the surface here. If there are correct and incorrect versions of a religious interpretation, then it might be possible to state that religious traditions are quite coherent and static. Religious extremism is thus disqualified as genuine religion since extremism seems to be founded upon incorrect readings of Scripture. The practitioner here expresses a need for expertise in order to sort out correct from incorrect interpretations.

Expert knowledge thus becomes available and useful by transforming or translating complex discussions about teachings into *counter-arguments*. Experts, either from the academy or from civil society (as in the case of imams), can provide practitioners with these practically useful tools. Another of the interviewees, Marie, describes her work in somewhat similar terms when talking about how she has used experts on Islamic teachings. She works in a municipality as a coordinator of the work to prevent violent extremism. In her work with potentially radicalised individuals or in cases where someone has reported a concern to the social authorities regarding a child, she sometimes needs help determining whether there is a risk of radicalisation or not. She tells me that she has a connection to an imam whom she frequently involves in her work because of his knowledge of Islamic teaching. He can point her in the right direction, for instance by clarifying whether a particular book, or a religious demagogue/lecturer, or a Quran school is linked to extreme traditions and is thus a sign of potential radicalisation. In her view, apart from being knowledgeable, he also contribute to her work by his positivity about Islam. She sees the normativity of the imam as allowing him to determine whether a particular Islamic tradition is good or bad:

> He [an imam] thinks that it is very positive that people are Muslims. And that is what we need. I mean a person who can determine *whether something is bad.* To do that, it has to be a person that is fundamentally positive to [Islam].

The imam's expertise lies specifically in determining whether, say, a particular book is a sign of radicalisation or fits into 'mainstream' Islam. This is what makes him so useful in social work, according to the interviewee. What are the tacit assumptions concerning religion here? I would suggest that this emphasis on good and bad doctrine embodies an essentialist vision of the religious, and thus as something that can be either good or bad. It is almost as if there is a kind of mainstream religion, a correct one, in contradistinction to an incorrect, bad or extreme one.

Another of the interviews draws attention to intellectual elements of religion, albeit in a slightly different manner. In the following quotation, Anders, who works in a civil society project with exit programmes and is involved in work to promote democracy and prevent radicalisation, tells me about how to use knowledge about religion in work to prevent extremism. He proposes that one could problematise what he sees as

a sectarian interpretation of the Hadith through knowledge and with the help of theological/philosophical arguments. The Hadith are Islamic traditions that speak of Mohammad's life, which is often taken as a model for living as a devout Muslim. However, Islamic theologians disagree on exactly how the Hadith are to be interpreted, with some advocating for more literal interpretations and others for more historicised interpretations. In the following quotation, the interviewee polemicises against and tries to problematise a literal interpretation:

> What you have been taught comes from a very sectarian movement, that claims that you are supposed to live exactly as people did in those times. You cannot use a toothbrush because the Prophet used a stick. But I can guarantee that the Prophet would not have used a stick in 2017, he would have used a toothbrush. But they do it exactly how they did it in those days. And they become so literal and fundamentalist in their ways, so we need a theologian who can explain the interpretation. How do you interpret such a verse or a Hadith? How do you really interpret it? So, provide them with the counterpropaganda that exists within Islam, of course, against these types of extremist interpretations.

Against a literal and fundamentalist interpretation of gum care using what is called a *miswak*, the interviewee insists that if the Prophet were alive today, he would have used a toothbrush. (It might be worth mentioning, in passing, that there are scientific studies that support the use of a miswak as superior to a toothbrush when it comes to gum and tooth care.[220])

What concerns us here, however, is not whether the repudiation of fundamentalist interpretations is based on false conclusions. What is illustrative about the quotation above is that Anders tries to repudiate certain interpretations that he regards as problematic or downright perilous. He tells me that 'we need a theologian who can *explain* the interpretation', that is, who can separate correct from incorrect doctrine, as it were. He further elaborates by stating that the 'interpretation they have received: "You shall live as the Prophet Muhammed did in the 600s, you cannot live any other way." In those cases, you need a religious person, one who knows theology, who can be involved and explain to the Muslim: 'You know what? There are four great schools in Islam and there have been in centuries. And these four schools are the biggest and most Muslims belong to the one of the four schools."' By exposing a particular interpretation as sectarian or marginal, the extremist disposition will be renounced altogether, according to the logic described here.

[220] Cf. Khalid Almas and Zuhari Al-Zeid, 'The immediate antimicrobial effect of a toothbrush and miswak on cariogenic bacteria: A clinical study,' *Journal of Contemporary Dental Practice* 5, no. 1 (02 15, 2004): 105–14.

Again, the tacit assumption is that an extremist disposition is a matter of how one interprets a verse or a Hadith, that is, it is principally a doctrinal matter. Showing that specific ideas are sectarian or literal, as in the case with the miswak, becomes a strategy to rework the extremist position, as if extremism is principally about ideas and interpretations. In other words, the quotations above reveal an implicit understanding of religion as principally intellectual and systematic, in contrast to lived experience.

Another take on the issue of religion as intellectual is given by Margarethe, a social worker who works for the municipality in one of the larger cities in Sweden. She tells me that she frequently involves imams and other experts in her work because they can help her to work out arguments and ways of critiquing fundamentalist or literal interpretations. When telling me about her relations with imams or religious congregations, she says that the imams have taught her that she can refute literal interpretations by saying: 'Allah cannot do everything. He needs help. That is why you should take medication, for instance. Some people think it is *haram* [forbidden] to take medication when you are mentally ill'. In her view, an argument that Allah cannot do everything, that Allah needs help, is a way to persuade her clients into taking medication when mentally ill. A non-literal interpretation thus becomes a counter-narrative against fundamentalism, again with the intent that the client should renounce their fundamentalist beliefs. This also means that the non-literal interpretation becomes synonymous with the *correct* interpretation. This is evident, I believe, from her phrasing, 'some people *think* it is haram to use medication,' thereby signalling that they are incorrect: they think, whereas she knows, since she is informed by imams. The quotation thus expresses an understanding of religion as a coherent and systematic framework in which there are some correct and some incorrect interpretations.[221]

A final example can shed light on this somewhat peculiar logic by which social workers teach religious citizens about their own religious beliefs. Let me return to the interviewee above, Anders, and his view that it could be fruitful to say that a specific interpretation is sectarian. He elaborates on this by saying:

> I have an example of this when I met a jihadist who had been in several countries and fought […] because sometimes it becomes very hands-on for us. And it was very interesting because when I asked him, I said: Of all the things you do and say,

[221] I have found a similar view of religion in a policy report. In the report, children and young people are interviewed, people who have had contact with extremism or live in neighbourhoods where religious extremism flourishes. Many of the interviewees say that religious extremism is incorrect in their religious interpretations. The argument in the policy report is thus that religion may prevent religious extremism, if based on correct interpretations. It is further suggested that imams and religious civil society have a role to play, as to explaining what is correct and what is incorrect interpretations, similar to the reasoning of the interviewees in this study. See Barnombudsmannen, 'Barns och ungas erfarenheter av våldsbejakande islamistisk extremism' (Stockholm: Barnombudsmannen, 2018).

> how do you sanction suicide attacks? I mean, when it is totally forbidden in religions, in all religions really, and you are sent to hell if you commit suicide.

In an attempt to problematise an extremist position or extreme philosophy, the interviewee draws upon a tradition in which suicide is forbidden. He even formulates it in religious language by stating that 'you are sent to hell if you commit suicide'. Again, the rationale is to provide the client with counter-arguments that reveal the fragility of the extremist interpretation. This is done by showing that the extremist view is sectarian or marginal in relation to the larger Islamic tradition or, as in this case, in religion altogether. Using Islamic interpretations of teachings as counter-narratives thus becomes a strategy to prevent extremism, as is also apparent in the following quotation in which he explains how he approaches suicide rhetoric:

> So how can you sanction suicide? What have your teachers or philosophers, or whatever they call themselves, what have they taught you about this? And he says, but you know that you need an intention before you do anything right? I have an intention, I shall drink water, I shall do this … In this case, a suicide attack is, like in the movie *Troy* and similar: there is a whole army on the other side. The hero gets up, takes off his armour so that he is completely naked or has a bare chest, grabs his sword and runs towards them. Do you think he intends to die? That is not suicide. That is a heroic act! So, when I am in my car, full of explosives, and drive towards this army, it is not about dying. I don't intend to die but to live, and I will break them all on the other side. That is what a suicide bomber thinks, and then you interpret your way around the Quran, which states that it is totally forbidden.

He suggests that the ban on suicide in Islam is circumvented by extremists through the idea of intentionality. The extremist position is in actuality *totally forbidden* in Islam, as described in the Koran, but extremists, as he puts it, interpret their way around doctrine, again indicating that there are very few grey areas in Islamic teachings: there are correct doctrines in which suicide is forbidden, and then there are incorrect ones, ways to circumvent official doctrine.

The view of religion implicit in the quotations above is, I propose, that religion is a system of doctrines or ideas that a few extremists or radicals simply overlook or reject. Religion is discursively linked to ideas and statements about correct and incorrect doctrines. By so clearly identifying a correct theological canon from which the extremist interpretation diverges, religion itself is portrayed as a system of doctrines, a term that is elaborated on later in this chapter.

Mark, who is one of the experts quoted above, tells me that in his contact with the media and with practitioners, laypeople often speak of religion as coherent systems, as something that more or less all participants of a tradition adhere to. The material

presented here can support his experiences in this regard. In this context, it becomes logical to try and rework or change an extremist disposition by drawing on evidence or knowledge about correct doctrine, implying that the extreme interpretation is sectarian, marginal and incorrect. In a slightly more critical formulation, one could say that practitioners become engaged in teaching their Muslim clients about correct and incorrect Islam.

Secularism and a Scientific Reading of Scripture

From the interview material, as construed through the lenses of theories about secularism, a certain notion of religion as doctrinal, propositionalist and intellectual emerges. But is this really the only available schema for understanding doctrines? Perhaps doctrines are central and pivotal to religious citizens, but in a different manner? It could serve social work well, I believe, to have a more nuanced and complex understanding of how religious doctrines relate to religious behaviours, ideas and organisations.

To be able to work out a position beyond the intellectualisation of doctrines, the intellectualist tradition is placed in a historical context. In order to gain some perspective and to see that an intellectualist position is by no means natural or given, we need to consider how the intellectualist understanding of religion emerged in the first place, and recognise that this view of the religious is contested and has been the subject of controversy. The reason for doing so is to open up novel paths of understanding of religion and, in the final instance, provide an alternative path towards the religious in social work more generally. If intellectualisation is a quite recent, and indeed a specifically Western understanding of doctrines, then finding alternative ways to understand doctrine is preferable in a multireligious context if we are to capture the whole span of religious traditions.

The intellectualist tradition is here historicised by a brief investigation into modern science and its truth claims. The scientific revolution can be said to have radically altered the very meaning of the word ‘truth’, and I believe that this altered understanding of truth echoes within work to prevent extremism and promote democracy and can be said to underwrite how practitioners think about correct and incorrect doctrines. In the work of Herbert Schnädelbach on post-Hegelian or post-metaphysical science and culture, the modern period is depicted as characterised by a quite drastic transformation of truth in which truth is never pinned down, never final. Truth in a scientific culture is always temporal, always to be replaced with better truths. According to Schnädelbach, post-Hegelian German philosophy is characterised principally by a series of reactions to positivism. Philosophy had to work out a position in relation to

science, no longer as the unifying discipline (as it was for Hegel and his peers) but as subordinate discipline or in an antagonistic relation to science, defined more specifically as *research*. Research is something quite different from science, as we shall soon see.

In the scientific era, reason became divorced from understanding, becoming instead synonymous with a '*formal* principle of procedure'.[222] A hallmark of research science is *temporalization*, marked by a view of science as 'constantly growing and changing as a result of experience', a system that is 'open to the future', writes Schnädelbach.[223] Truth itself is always in a state of flux, always exposed to the latest research, and is always open-ended, never final. In more general terms, Michael Allen Gillespie says that this is a metaphysical hallmark of the modern age in general, through which 'a new notion of time not as circular and finite but as linear and infinite'[224] enabled and launched a progressive ideal. The flows of time are being linked not to degeneration, as they were for ancient philosophers, but to improvement and progression. Returning to Schnädelbach, he shows how a science culture began to formulate truth as empirical and progressive, instead of as a system of eternal truth, that is, as metaphysics. Just as time progresses, so does truth, which is now better and better realised the further we venture into nature. The ramification of this new vision is that truth can never be pinned down: truth is particular, always to be replaced with better, newer truths. To avoid total relativism, the idea of truth was projected onto the future: truth became something to which we always aspire, something that is realised only in the future.

Truth has thus radically changed form in the transition from metaphysics and philosophy to research. Truth is no longer understood as eternal, but as a never-ending project of finding the most accurate descriptions (and predictions) of the natural world. It can be suggested that a temporalised conception of truth is applied equally to religion in the modern age. In the next chapter, I show that belief is not an ahistorical constant. Belief often takes a very specific form in the modern West, but this form is anachronistically applied to other epochs as if they believed in their sacred objects in exactly the same way that moderns do.[225] In a similar manner, it could be proposed that the notion of truth that lurks within a research-scientific culture is extended and applied further to religious teachings and doctrines, as if these too are temporal truths, always to be replaced by newer and better ones. Or more importantly, it is assumed

[222] Herbert Schnädelbach, *Philosophy in Germany 1831–1933*, trans. Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 69.
[223] Schnädelbach, *Philosophy in Germany*, 88.
[224] Michael Allen Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 5.
[225] See Robert Pfaller, *On the Pleasure Principle in Culture: Illusions Without Owners*, trans. Lisa Rosenblatt, Charlotte Eckler and Camilla Nielsen (London: Verso, 2014).

that a religious teaching can be disproved, that it follows the same rationale as a scientific treatise by being either true or false. This line of reasoning is also, according to the analysis here, what marks the rationale of critiquing religious doctrines and teachings with the hope and ambition that the whole religious enterprise will successively collapse.

Support for this insight concerning truth in the modern age is found in Gavin Hyman's *A Short History of Atheism*. Hyman suggests that atheism is inextricably linked to a specific form of modern theism. The domestication of God in late medieval and early modern theology, as noted not only by Hyman,[226] made religion and biblical interpretations particularly fragile to biblical criticism. It is a very specific reading of the Bible, one could say an ontological or 'historical' reading, that makes it susceptible to scientific critique, and which more broadly accounts for how science and religion came to be at odds with one another in the first place.[227] In staking out his argument, Hyman draws on Amos Funkenstein's view that science and theology became fused in seventeenth-century Europe. Funkenstein describes this process of univocalisation (nature and the divine are univocal) by saying that 'theological concerns were expressed in terms of secular knowledge, and scientific concerns were expressed in theological terms', a unification which later 'gave way to a new generation of *savants* whose posture was often anti-theological, sometimes also anti-religious, occasionally even atheistic'.[228] It was both the 'democratisation' of theology, by which laymen increasingly became involved in theological discourse (of which the Reformation's catchword *sola scriptura* is an emblematic example), and the incorporation of mathematics in almost every domain of knowledge that marked the emergence of 'secular theologies', to use Funkenstein's term. Drawing on this insight, Hyman suggests that these secular theologies mark the emerging conflict between religion and science in the modern age.

Hyman also shows how biblical hermeneutics was very much affected by this trend. The Bible came increasingly to be understood as a repository of literal, historical truths and, more importantly, it was assumed that this had always been the case, thus overlooking previous allegorical and typological exegesis. For the early church fathers, however, 'the sacred text is treated as a mere symbol, or allegory, of spiritual truths. The literal, historical sense, if it was to be regarded at all, plays a relatively

[226] Gavin Hyman, *A Short History of Atheism* (London/New York: I.B. Tauris, 2010); See also John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason (*Oxford: Blackwell, 2006); Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century* (Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1986); Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, Mass/London: MIT Press, 1985).
[227] Hyman, *A Short History of Atheism*.
[228] Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination*, 346.

minor role'.[229] Even when historical accounts and facts were considered, the reading of the Bible was principally typological and thus also principally spiritual rather than literal. But in the modern age when scientific and biblical discourse were conflated and accuracy, precision and certainty became guiding concepts, the Bible came to be read as a scientific treatise, as 'the straightforward recording of empirical fact', as Hyman says.[230]

When conflated, science and religion became antagonists whereas in fact, as Brad Gregory eminently phrases it, it was incompatible 'views about the meaning of God's actions [that] created an intellectually sterile impasse'.[231] What is conceived of as an inevitable clash between two theories of the world (science and religion) can in Gregory's view be better understood as an evacuation of theology from the natural world due to theologically irresolvable disputes during the Reformation. For Gregory as well as for Hyman, it was the emergence of nominalism and voluntarism in Christian theology (as elaborated in chapter 5), with the primacy of the concept of Being, that allowed for a conflation of science and religion. For Hyman's argument, this means that conflating science and religion in this way led to literal readings of the Bible. A literal reading of the Bible is susceptible to historical critique, and when specific parts of the Bible were repudiated by historical research, religious belief *in general* was further undermined. Moreover, religion and science were drawn into an antagonist relation to one another by formulating them both as aspiring to say something about truth, that is, the *exact same kind* of truth. In other words, modern atheism is not atheism in general but a rejection of a domesticated and immanent God who bears little if any resemblance to the God of Thomism during the Middle Ages, for instance.

The point of drawing on this research is to show that the idea of religion as coherent systems and a form of empirical truth, which were tacit assumptions in the analysis above, is by no means self-evident. To think of religious doctrines and teachings as principally intellectual and as entailing a similar truth to scientific truth is a quite recent idea, one that is bound up with scientific studies and comparisons of different religions. More fundamentally, it is bound up with the new theological landscape that emerged after the dust had settled from the controversy concerning the so-called problem of universals at the end of the Middle Ages. The following is thus proposed:

[229] J.N.D. Kelly cited in Hyman, *A Short History of Atheism*, 86.
[230] Hyman, *A Short History of Atheism*, 89.
[231] Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge/London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012), 47.

Within a context where articles of faith are formulated in terms of precision and certainty, and where doctrines are understood as only/principally revealing something ontological, empirical, or intellectual rather than, say, something spiritual or typological (e.g., exemplary behaviour), the project of repudiating specific articles of faith as a way of undermining a religious tradition emerges as natural, as almost a given. The work to prevent extremism and promote democracy is a child of the Enlightenment's critique of religion in this regard. Practitioners, too, formulate religion as a set of empirical statements, and only as empirical statements. However, if scripture is understood allegorically, as for many of the early church fathers, then debunking religious ideas as false or as lacking historical ground would be unlikely to yield the results that practitioners are after: the reworking of the religious disposition.

When working with issues concerning religion, then, one should not be too hasty in assuming that doctrines have the same epistemological status as scientific facts, although this may be so in some cases. In their dealings with a variety of different religious interpretations, social workers could benefit from a conceptualisation of religion that does not limit itself to these readings of scripture. To draw on an earlier example, declaring that a miswak is inferior to a toothbrush says something ontological about a Salafist interpretation perhaps, but not necessarily something spiritual or allegorical. Using a miswak cannot be interpreted solely from the standpoint of the most effective way of combatting gum-related diseases. To use a miswak is equally (or more importantly) to develop a relation and a sense of belonging to the Prophet, something that escapes any ontological statement about its effectiveness. In other words, a believer could very well want to use a miswak despite a sea of scientific evidence proving it to be inferior to a toothbrush (although even this is not true). Just to be clear, it is not proposed here that using a miswak has only spiritual connotations, for indeed liturgy often has practical, theoretical *and* spiritual implications. What is problematised here is the reduction of it solely to its practical elements.

It is vital when working with religion to have these nuances in mind. If we take Schnädelbach's note seriously, as I think that we should, then it is only quite recently that even science came to be concerned with temporal and verifiable/falsifiable truths, because science previously was under the domain of philosophy, or better yet, metaphysics. When liberating itself from philosophy, science became projected onto the future and became open-ended. Thus, what may appear as a timeless conceptualisation of doctrines is in fact far from it, according to the genealogical investigation undertaken here. To avoid overgeneralisation by which a specific modern/Western theory of religion is unreflectively applied to any religious tradition, these nuances and distinctions offered to us through genealogical investigations may prove to be pivotal.

To evacuate a theological position of its spiritual, mystical or allegorical functions and consider it a mere (dead) empirical fact may capture some aspects of the religious, but it does not encompass the whole span of religious dispositions. Again, having these distinctions in mind is essential if social work is to deal with religion in a productive manner.

Religion as a Set of Propositions

When formulating a theory of religion not limited to intellectualism, Talal Asad can bring further clarity and interesting insights relevant to social work. He addresses what happens when religion is reduced to its official and intellectual content, seen as separable from its lived and practical aspects.

Asad has devoted much scholarly attention to understanding how the religious and the secular are linked and how the modern West 'invented' something that is now being understood as religion. In his analyses of how the secular and the religious are linked, he claims 'that there is nothing essentially religious, nor any universal essence that defines "sacred language" or "sacred experience"'.[232] In Latin Christendom, for instance, although the world was divided into the secular and the religious, this meant something entirely different from the modern divide. Today, the secular is often thought of as a space of pure action or pure instrumentality, evacuated of religious sentiments and claims,[233] whereas in the past, the secular was the spaces outside of the church's domain (e.g. the space outside monasteries), but these were by no means irreligious spaces.[234] In the modern West, however, anthropology has 'rendered a variety of overlapping social usages [of the term religion] rooted in changing and heterogeneous forms of life into a single immutable essence, and claimed it to be the object of a universal human experience called "religious"', says Asad.[235]

Anthropologists came to define the religious in specific ways, a project that itself was part of a colonial project of rendering the world within the domains of the West. What underwrote this project was aspirations to classify and construe native worlds (which, as Edward Said has shown, was an essential means to solidify domination[236]). Rituals or rites were given specific attention here, understood as occupying a domain of their own, irreducible to the practical, social or 'non-symbolic' dimensions of a culture. Asad states that rituals were conceived of 'in terms of signifying behaviour –

[232] Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam and Modernity* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2003), 25.
[233] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory.*
[234] José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1994).
[235] Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, 31.
[236] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Classics, 2003).

a type of activity to be classified separately from practical, that is, technically effective, behaviour'.[237] From having been integrated into a lifeworld or a culture with symbolic, technical, economic and social functions, rituals and rites in the minds of anthropologists were effectively reduced exclusively to symbolism. Rituals or rites had a wide range of functions before, but in the eyes of anthropologists, these practices were construed of as being directed only at the religious. This, Asad says, is how the religious was invented and given a specific domain of life, separable from all other domains.

To illustrate how this may play out today, and to argue for the continued relevance of Asad's insights, I offer a concrete example from contemporary literature in social work that is similar in its reductionism to the example of the miswak above. In this example, one of the interviewees in an interview study with young unaccompanied minors who had presented herself as a secular or atheist suddenly begins to wear a veil. One of the researchers construed this change as a sign of intensified or newly found faith. However, when asked about it, she replied that a doctor had prescribed that she should keep her head warm.[238] This example illustrates how a secularist interpretation of wearing a veil can foreclose any alternative or co-existing explanations. The veil has symbolic connotations, but it also protects from harmful sunlight and offers warmth. This is how one could read Asad, and examples such as this illustrate how his line of reasoning is highly relevant when working with religion practically.

There is yet another aspect of Asad's reasoning that I find relevant. The implication of reducing religious practice to its symbolic dimensions is that religion is effectively reduced to its official statements. Asad argues, in company with many others,[239] that not only is religion privatised, but that religion itself is reduced to and becomes nothing more than a set of doctrines or teachings that are held together by a 'cosmic framework' or a set of ideas. Anthropology emphasises only the intellectual elements in religion, as if these have a power of their own apart from the wide range of activities that are supposed to instil or cultivate personal belief. To become religious is, on a secularist reading, to internalise divine demands (in the same way that one becomes an extremist according to much of the literature). It is as though the mere encounter with these religious demands turns the individual into a believer.

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[237] Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Disciplines and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore/London: John Hopkins University Press, 1993), 58.

[238] Marcus Herz and Philip Lalander, '"Unaccompanied Minors" in Sweden Reflecting on Religious Faith and Practice,' *Journal of Youth Studies* (2020): 8, https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2020.1800612.

[239] Cf. William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*; William E. Connolly, *Why I Am not a Secularist* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

An Alternative to Intellectualism

Now that I have provided some context to the way religion, or at least one aspect of it, is often understood in modernity, I shall devote the remainder of this chapter to working out an alternative position that can allow social workers to identify the interplay between practical and embodied elements of religion vis-à-vis intellectual/doctrinal content. This amounts to the constructive part of the analysis, which is informed and vindicated by the discursive and genealogical analyses above.

When contrasting modern and pre-modern interpretations of religion, Asad draws on the work of Augustine (a church father who lived 354–430). In prescribing and explaining the complexities of Christian dispositions, Augustine suggests that faith is not merely made up of its teachings or scriptures, but equally of 'power – ranging all the way from laws (imperial and ecclesiastical) and other sanctions […] to the disciplinary activities of social institutions […] and of human bodies (fasting, prayer, obedience, penance)'.[240] For Augustine, 'the effect of an entire network of motivated practices, assumes a religious form because of the end to which it is directed.'[241] Were it not for all these disciplinary activities,[242] a Christian disposition could not be instilled. Scriptures, for Augustine, have no force on their own; they become meaningful only within a cosmic framework that brings together *all of these activities*. The implications of an Augustinian emphasis on a cosmic framework are that a religious disposition is formed in the coming together of a wide variety of actions, thoughts and institutions that target the body just as they target the mind. In other words, an Augustinian disposition is an *embodied* disposition, not merely a cognitive or intellectual one, and thus, not one that is likely to be contradicted intellectually.

If an Augustinian disposition represents an embodied disposition, then a modern, anthropological one is its opposite. Asad insists that anthropology has decontextualised the symbolic and, equally, the intellectual: 'It is a modern idea that a practitioner cannot know how to live religiously without being able to articulate that knowledge.'[243] What he means by this is that a modern view of religious dispositions take note only of their verbalised, that is, their cognitive and linguistic aspects, neglecting their embodied, even practical elements. It is within this movement from lived and embodied to intellectualised that Asad locates the modern trend of seeing religion as 'a set of propositions to which believers gave assent, and which could

[240] Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 35.
[241] Ibid.
[242] 'Discipline' meant something slightly different in Augustinianism than it does in a post-Foucauldian era, where discipline has a negative ring to it.
[243] Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 36.

therefore be judged and compared as between different religions and as against natural science'.[244] It is by being reduced only to its intellectual content that the religious becomes a contestant to the scientific, as if the two always belong to the same area of experience, an identification that was first made in modernity. It is within a 'cognitivist notion of religion',[245] as Asad calls it, as analogous to a scientific treatise that dogmas, doctrines or opinions become something that a believer can assent to or dissent from.

Ola Sigurdson paints a similar picture in his study of incarnation in Christian theology. According to Sigurdson, incarnation has come to be interpreted intellectually in modernity. In contrast, in his study of incarnation he places equal emphasis on practice, saying that to study the theological history of the doctrine of incarnation is to study how ideas are received, practised, and embodied in liturgy and practice. Theoretical reflections on the meaning of incarnation cannot be separated from how incarnation is lived and practised, whereby the church or the community is inextricably linked to an understanding of being the body of Christ. Sigurdson says: 'For the early church, "doctrine" was coaching in a way to live in a form of discipleship that covered both the active and the contemplative life, what one in Antiquity called *paideia'*.[246] Even the most theoretical reflections in religious traditions are often linked to practice, something that (modern) intellectualist interpretations seem to omit.

In summing up his argument, Asad suggests that what seems like a self-evident statement; that religion is essentially symbolic practices that can be separated from their cultural or historical formations has a specific, indeed Christian, history.[247] When operating in a multicultural and multireligious context, as social workers do, Asad's caution may prove useful; one should not be too hasty in identifying all religion with its cognitive content. Although fittingly describing some Christian traditions (although definitely not all of them, as Sigurdson shows), this concept of religion cannot unequivocally be applied to other religions or other Christian traditions, at least not without risking genuine confusion.

[244] Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 41, See also Harrison, *Religion and the Religions in the English Enlightenment.*
[245] Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 48.
[246] Sigurdson, *Heavenly Bodies*, 40–41
[247] Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 42

A Typology of Doctrines

The genealogical analysis above has shown how religion in the modern West is often reduced to its intellectual and verbal content, as if teachings and teachings alone are what forms a religious disposition, acting as a coercive force on the believer. For practical purposes, we could perhaps benefit from an alternative view of religion to help us better navigate the field of religious practice. An alternative to intellectualisation puts a parenthesis around the project of trying to disprove religious teachings with counter-narratives, which can prove to be rather futile. In order to broaden the scope of this enquiry and show that there may be other ways of understanding religion, I now explore and investigate the work of George A. Lindbeck, who offers a productive alternative to intellectualisation.

Let me begin with the opening lines of Lindbeck's book *The Nature of Doctrine*. Here, he proclaims an enigma of sorts:

> Over and over again in recent years, there have been reports from Roman Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant theologians engaged in dialogue sponsored by their respective churches that they are in basic agreement on such topics as the Eucharist, ministry, justification, or even the papacy, and yet they continue – so they claim – to adhere to their historic and once-divisive convictions.[248]

Lindbeck's point is that despite being in agreement on certain doctrinal matters and in some ways effectively changing some of their initial views, their basic doctrinal belongings and broader disagreements prevail. Doctrines, even when severely challenged, remain relevant and important to believers. In order to explain how this is possible, Lindbeck sets out to establish the roles of doctrines in religion. His investigation effectively achieves two things: it offers a typology of doctrines and, which is his main purpose, it paves the way for a post-liberal theology.

Let me begin with his typology, which is of relevance to social work. When working with religion in practical social work, it is imperative to distinguish, as Lindbeck does, between (1) cognitive, (2) experiential-expressive and (3) cultural-linguistic theories of religion. The cognitive type resembles the way religion was understood by the practitioners above and in the theoretical argument by Talal Asad, that is, religion construed as a system of doctrines, imperatives or rules. Lindbeck states that what characterises the cognitive type is that 'church doctrines function as informative propositions or truth claims about objective realities'.[249] The cognitive type emphasises technical and official doctrine, often at the expense of mundane religious

[248] George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminister Press, 1984), 15.
[249] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 16.

language that effectively becomes second order or is neglected altogether. This cognitive type resonates well with how religion is understood and conceptualised in the work analysed above in which a religious tradition can be understood by analysing its articles of faith. Specific books, YouTube channels and lectures, debates concerning what counts as suicide and what does not (as one of the interviewees elaborated above), all of these make up the doctrinal side of religion.

However, as Lindbeck points out, this is not the only available way to understand doctrine. The experiential-expressive tradition, which Lindbeck identifies largely with a Schleiermacherian theology of inner belief,[250] interprets doctrines as 'noninformative and nondiscursive symbols of inner feelings, attitudes, or existential orientations'.[251] Religion emerges within the depths of the individual, according to the experiential-expressivist view. What does this mean for an interpretation of teachings? What Lindbeck points to here is how teachings and religious myths are vehicles for individuals to realise their *already existing* faith, understood more directly in emotional terms.[252] It is not scripture that instils faith; on the contrary, it functions as a way for the sole believer to further cultivate already firm beliefs. Much has been written on this subject, and the works of Charles Taylor have particularly guided me in understanding this form of belief, as discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

Finally, Lindbeck adds another type, which he terms the cultural-linguistic type. This last type, like the cognitive type, emphasises doctrine, but with a twist. Here, religious doctrine and myths are not propositional in the sense that they force the believer to either assent or reject them; rather, they function as a framework or, to use Wittgenstein's term, a *language game* that accustoms the believer to and socialises the subject into a specific lifeworld.[253] Doctrines are 'not primarily an array of beliefs about the true and the good', writes Lindbeck, but function as 'an idiom that makes possible the description of realities, the formulation of beliefs, and the experiencing of inner attitudes, feelings and sentiments'.[254] To clarify, although the cultural-linguistic model is concerned with inner feelings, these are not the ground on which

[250] This reading of Schleiermacher as a radical expressivist may, however, be somewhat simplistic. B. A. Gerrish suggests that Lindbeck's alternative to expressivism is in fact quite similar to what Schleiermacher himself opted for: 'In Schleiermacher's view, doctrines do not express a prelinguistic experience but an experience that has already been constituted by the language of the community. Indeed, although doctrines in his sense are not strictly second-order or metalinguistic, their function is precisely to move the community's language from its primary poetic and rhetorical forms to the more exact form that he terms "descriptively-didactic"'. See B. A Gerrish, 'Review of Lindbeck's "The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age",' *Journal of Religion* 68, no. 1 (1988): 90, https://doi.org/10.1086/487718.

[251] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 16

[252] Expressivism, one could argue, is closely linked to what today often is termed spirituality.

[253] See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958).

[254] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 33.

religion rests (as in expressivist traditions), but certain sentiments become *available* to the believer by being accustomed to doctrines, myths and narratives.

This third type brings me to the second purpose of Lindbeck's book, namely his argument for post-liberal theology. Lindbeck draws from insights in social science on culture and anthropology and applies these to theology in an attempt to work out a theory of doctrines directly at odds with the experiential-expressivist view, inverting the relation of the internal and external dimensions of religion. His approach is thus closer to the cognitive view, but without intellectualisation. To become religious is not to deliberatively choose to follow propositions. Rather, 'to become religious', writes Lindbeck, 'is to interiorize a set of skills by practice and training. One learns how to feel, act, and think in conformity with a religious tradition that is, in its inner structure, far richer and more subtle than can be explicitly articulated'.[255] The mindful reader can notice some resemblances between Lindbeck and the previously described Augustinian position here. Lindbeck does not draw on Augustine, however, but on social science. He cites Clifford Geertz approvingly, suggesting that 'a religion cannot be treated as a formalizable "symbolic system … by isolating its elements, specifying the internal relationships among these elements' because doing so always risks 'locking … analysis away from its proper object, the informal logic of actual life"'.[256] Lindbeck thus defends 'doctrinal religion' against experiential-expressivism. But he does so in a different manner than cognitivists, who in Lindbeck's view treat doctrines in strictly ontological terms. In his critique of cognitivism, he goes so far as to say that '[f]or a propositionalist, if a doctrine is once true, it is always true, and if it is once false, it is always false'.[257] This, he believes, is not the case for the cultural-linguistic type, in which doctrines are regulative, that is, 'permanently authoritative paradigms, not formulas to be slavishly repeated'.[258]

Let me illustrate this theoretical excursion with a simple example from the Bible: the story of the tower of Babel. (I am not a theologian, so bear with me in this brief analysis.) The Bible tells the story of a group of people who decided to build a city with a tower reaching all the way to the heavens, so that it would be known all over the world. Humanity would be united by this achievement, or so they thought. God responded by claiming that if they achieved their goal and built that tower, anything would be possible for them. To prevent this and to punish them, God sowed discord and confusion between languages.[259] Now, suppose that a historian were to claim to

[255] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 35.
[256] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 115.
[257] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 16.
[258] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 96.
[259] Genesis 11:1–9.

have found evidence that the techniques and the material for constructing such a tower had not yet been invented at that point in history. Ergo, the tower could never have been built. Does this claim render the story meaningless to a believing Christian or a Jew? Isn't the story more about pride and hubris than about whether the tower could have been built? To say that the tower could not have been built may have ontological implications, but the story goes far beyond that. By not seeing also the moral implications of the story, one would fail to grasp the whole story and the meaning it has for a believer. As this simple example shows, merely refuting doctrines would be unlikely to yield the result that practitioners seek, because the meaning of doctrines may supersede the functions of isolated truth claims. Doctrines may be far more elusive, far more all-encompassing than that.

What use is Lindbeck in social work then? Lindbeck is able to clarify the problem with intellectualism in regard to doctrines. If doctrines are frameworks, that is to say, if they are forms of sense-making that constitute and shape the worldview of a community of believers, then working to alter them simply by challenging them intellectually is likely to be unsuccessful. Doctrines, on Lindbeck's account, are linked to practices, to culture, and to social processes, which means that one needs to work with and try to understand how certain doctrines and teachings give meaning to the specific context in which they are adopted. By drawing attention to the 'informal logic of actual life' as Lindbeck puts it, social workers could become aware of how spiritual, practical and social processes are interlinked.

To link back to the discussion above; just because a social worker can show that a specific doctrine is 'sectarian', that is, is adhered to only by a small minority within a vast corpus, or because it can be argued to be obsolete (as with the miswak above), does not mean that this particular doctrine or the broader religious disposition will be re-evaluated or abandoned by the believer. The only reason to think that counter-arguments would be effective is if one treats doctrines rationalistically or propositionally. When they are understood as regulative principles or frameworks on the other hand, practitioners will recognise that simply providing arguments against doctrines is unlikely to have the desired effect.

Using Lindbeck's Typology in Social Work

From the analysis above, one aspect of how religion is conceived of and responded to in work to prevent extremism and promote democracy is that it is tacitly identified with its doctrinal elements. Historical analysis has shown that this way of conceptualising religion is by no means self-evident. Religion qua doctrines is not an ahistorical

constant. This insight allows us to question whether extremism is likely to be prevented by disproving its articles of faith.

With Lindbeck's help, we can see how an intellectualist understanding of religion represents one of several options to understand the role of doctrines in religious traditions. Lindbeck separates the intellectualist tradition (the cognitive type in his terminology) from the Romantic, experiential-expressive type. In the latter, scriptures and teachings are expressions of an inner inclination, a sense of the divine that guides the believer in choosing the preferred teachings, practices and congregations. In secularistic theories of religion, emphasis is often placed on both the cognitive, intellectual aspects of a religion and its expressive, emotional aspects,[260] usually at the expense of the lived elements of a religious tradition. In this chapter, we can see an effect of intellectualism in the way practitioners go to great lengths to contradict doctrines with intellectual arguments. Rather than placing an extremist position in context and trying to understand the role particular doctrines play for a specific community, which has moral, practical and spiritual implications, the emphasis is solely on that which can be contradicted intellectually and factually. Against these reductions of religion to its doctrinal and official elements, Lindbeck adds another type, the cultural-linguistic, for which religious teachings are more like the grammar of the language of the religious culture. Teachings are still doctrinal in a sense, albeit as frameworks, as encapsulating stories and linguistic games that allow people to become integrated into a tradition. Lindbeck's alternative could provide us with an initial conceptualisation of religion that I believe could be fruitful and productive in social work.

Let me illustrate how Lindbeck's argument makes sense and bring out its implications for practice with a hypothetical example. Say that a client expresses violent ideas in religious language. With a cognitive theory of religion, the issue could be approached by bringing in counterclaims and arguments against a specific teaching. With an experiential-expressive theory of religion, one might perhaps emphasise the personal emotions and ideas that justify these violence-affirming doctrines. It is here that I find Lindbeck's third type, the cultural-linguistic type, advantageous. The cultural-linguistic type does not reduce religion to *either* its intellectual content or to personal justifications; rather, religious doctrines and inner inclinations are seen as

[260] See Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion is Giving way to Spirituality* (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2005); Grace Davies, *Europe: The Exceptional Case. Parameters of Faith in the Modern World* (London: Dartman Longman & Todd, 2002); Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Massachusetts/London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

formed, shaped and moulded in a cultural, social setting. Certain emotions, inclinations and desires become available in a specific context, whereas other are unavailable. To work with a religious extremist thus entails trying to understand how certain acts become understandable and preferable in relation to their religious worldview, instead of assuming beforehand that specific teachings in themselves motivate an act.

The reason why a cognitive interpretation of religion has reached its current status in work to prevent extremism is that it harmonises well with the risk management logic that can now be said to permeate social work,[261] in terms of which social problems are reduced to a set of risk indicators. However, when looked at through a different lens – a cultural-linguistic view of religion – a doctrine or a teaching would not per se represent a risk factor or a risk indicator. If doctrines are reduced to their factual and propositional content, they tend to be circumscribed with a kind of timelessness, an aura of rigidity. With a cultural-linguistic approach, on the other hand, doctrines are always interpreted and lived in a cultural context, which means that doctrines are flexible, reinterpretable and context-dependent. Such a view shifts attention away from the systematic aspects of religion and thus also from religious doctrines as risk factors; instead it allow us to pay attention to how a religious tradition is lived. One could, for instance, want to investigate what role a specific narrative plays for a group and how a specific group makes sense of the world in which they live. This approach provide an impetus for a more thorough investigation and understanding of how social contexts interplay with religious teachings.

We might, for instance, be interested in understanding how a religious tradition is reinterpreted when people move to a new country. What role does religion play in processes of migration and ways for making sense of the world when drastically changing setting? Or how do socioeconomic contexts interplay with a religious worldview? We might also want to know how Salafism, often the main religious tradition mentioned in regard to religious extremism,[262] takes on different guises. My proposition is that there is an important difference depending on whether a believer is living a well-ordered life in Egypt or is structurally marginalised in a socioeconomically weak suburban area in Sweden. It could be assumed that the narratives of Salafism, the practices and ways of life built into a Salafist mode of life, take on different meanings in different religious, political and structural settings.

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[261] Stephen A. Webb, *Social Work in a Risk Society: Social and Political Perspectives* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Mark Hardy, *Governing Risk: Care and Control in Contemporary Social Work* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).
[262] See Quintan Wiktorowicz, 'Anatomy of the Salafi Movement,' *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 29, no. 3 (2006): 207–39, https://doi.org/10.1080/10576100500497004.

This approach of identifying religious doctrines as shaped and interpreted in a social setting is not intended to shift attention away from religion. It does not amount to saying that religion is irrelevant in social problems such as extremism, honour violence or the like, or that these are *really* cultural/political/socioeconomic problems. The approach chosen here is an acknowledgement of how the issues of religion are always vexed and mixed with a variety of other factors. In the initial section of this dissertation, I stated my belief that we can maintain an interest in religion as a factor in extremism without ontologising violence as the essence of religion. Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic vision is one way to do so.

To conclude, the essence of religion is neither its official doctrines, nor feeling. Following Lindbeck's argument that religion is neither pure sentiment nor pure intellectualism, the next chapter examines the second type in Lindbeck's typology, the experiential-expressive type, in a similar way to the way the cognitive type has been problematised in this chapter. The argument taken from Lindbeck is that religion is lived, practised, and formulated within a community of believers and in a specific setting. Lindbeck thus offers me a starting point to work out a concept of religion that is more encompassing, and in my opinion better, than a secularist concept: a phenomenological understanding of religion as lifeworld.

4. BEYOND EXPRESSIVISM: BELIEF AS DISAVOWAL

In the previous chapter I concluded that religion is not merely a set of doctrines or teachings, as if these drifted around for the believer to simply pluck from the sky. Religion goes far beyond systematic expressions; religion is lived, formed within a cultural, social and pragmatic realm. To speak in Lindbeck's terms, the previous chapter interrogated the logic and the history of the intellectualist or cognitive position. This chapter conducts a similar investigation into the second type in Lindbeck's typology, the experiential-expressivist type, which I shall hereafter simply call *expressivism*.

This chapter thus continues down the same lines as the previous one by expanding upon religion as lived via the literature on theological and philosophical history linked to beliefs and innerness. When it comes to the issue of radicalisation, the process of radicalisation is often portrayed as an *intensification of beliefs* by which individuals who, as Silber and Bhatt phrase it,

> begin to explore Salafi Islam, gradually gravitate away from their old identity and begin to associate themselves with like-minded individuals and adopt this ideology as their own. The catalyst for this "religious seeking" is a cognitive opening, or crisis, which shakes one's certitude in previously held beliefs and opens an individual to be receptive to new worldviews.[263]

Radicalisation is, on this view, driven by inner motifs, by intensified emotions that draw the individual towards radical/violent ideologies. That is to say, radicalisation is primarily an inner process in which emotions and convictions are the main cause of action. This view on the relation between inwardness and external behaviour resonates quite well with popular opinion, which often assumes that one prays, for instance,

[263] Mitchell D. Silber and Arvin Bhatt, *Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat* (New York: New York City Police Department, 2007), 6.

because of an inner inclination to do so, out of piousness. In work to prevent extremism and promote democracy, this idea is often translated into an attempt to change the inner beliefs of the client: moving them from radicalism to a belief in democracy. On this rationale, it is the inner beliefs or emotions rather than the behaviour itself that becomes the primary object of intervention.

But if social work is to take religion seriously, we need to scrutinise the ideal of innerness in modernity. There are reasons to doubt that all religious acts are motivated from within. To be better equipped for working with religious citizens, we must with genuine interest pose the question: What motivates an act of belief? Is it always piousness as expressed in external forms that motivates religious activities, or are there other motivations as well?

This chapter is thus an investigation into the ideals of innerness. In the analysis, it is noted how religion and ideology tend to be tacitly understood as driven by inner inclinations. This taken-for-granted assumption in the material is then scrutinised and critically discussed in terms of what turns out to be a quite complex history concerning the ideal of innerness in modernity. The main theoretical source here is Charles Taylor, who has written extensively on modern subjectivity, authenticity and religion in a secular age. His writings offer a contextualisation and historicisation of inner inclinations. Even more radically, his writings offer a sceptical position and a distancing from the empirical material and contemporary predicaments through his claim that in some eras of Western history, humans were not really thought to have something that can be called an inner self in the first place. In his writings, it becomes clear that innerness is neither a transhistorical nor transcultural constant, but was in fact launched within a specific culture – the modern Western one – and that the idea that we have an inner self has significantly shaped our ideas about religion. It is from these ideas that we have come to think of an act as necessarily drawing its sustenance from an inner, personal belief.

The remainder of the chapter is devoted to working out an alternative to expressivism when it comes to understanding the relation between our innermost thoughts, wishes and emotions vis-à-vis the act of belief. With the help of Marxist theorists Louis Althusser, Robert Pfaller and Slavoj Žižek, I develop a vision of the act as primary, as that which produces inner inclinations. Pfaller and Žižek even hold that there is no need for a believing subject at all: the act of belief stands for itself. These theoretical inquiries convince me that religious behaviour does not unequivocally originate in the mind or soul of the believer. If we shift our attention from inner desire to how the religious is a vehicle and a product of sense-making, then it becomes clear that an act can have a variety of meanings and purposes. When it comes to extremism,

religious beliefs become meaningful in relation to other norms and desires such as richness and glory, adventure, and a restored masculinity, as research on jihadism confirms.[264]

By turning towards processes of sense-making, the sharp boundary between religious and political/economic/social reasons or motivations for joining a radical religious movement breaks down. A subjectivist understanding of religion lends itself to a sharp delimitation between the religious, understood as inner emotions and wishes induced by a sense of the infinite, whereas economic or political reasons are pragmatic. In contradistinction, if religion is a sense-making activity, then religious ideas, doctrines and teachings, practices and liturgies are both meaningful and produce meaning within a specific setting, one that is equally economic, political and practical. An intersubjective vision is able to see how religion always transcends the individual, meaning that individual preferences are always shaped in relation to a community and to practice. This reciprocity in regard to innerness and external behaviour, and the proposed contextualisation of beliefs, is an important stepping-stone towards a phenomenological theory of religion.

The implications for social work practice of recognising that inner inclinations are partly a product of sense-making are that social work practitioners may devote less attention to the inner processes of their clients. Parts of the work to prevent extremism and promote democracy are devoted to trying to alter the inner convictions of clients from radical to democratic. But if one were to assume a position that religious emotions and convictions are related to practice, one would perhaps place emphasis on the act and the meaning of the act in a specific setting or community. Rather than assuming that an act always corresponds to inner sentiments and piousness, one could easily see how the act is meaningful in relation to a broader set of experiences that may have to do with factors other than inner religiosity.

Reflexivity and Contemplated Beliefs in Practice

The theoretical discussion in this chapter is actualised by how the practitioners interviewed relate to and describe their approaches to radicalisation, as well as on their work to provide an alternative to radicalism. According to the analysis conducted here, both radicalism and an alternative – a democratic disposition – are discursively linked to ideas of personal responsibility and private, inner convictions related to ideology or religion. I thus identify an implicit preconception that religion and ideology are clearly related to inner convictions and beliefs.

[264] See Olivier Roy, *Jihad och döden* [*Le Djihad et la mort*] (Göteborg: Bokförlaget Daidalos, 2016).

The strategy and the rationale identified in the interview material presented in this chapter are in some sense directly at odds with how religion was construed in those parts of the work we could see in the previous chapter. Rather than identifying religion with its doctrinal elements as a coherent system, we here see a subjectivist theory of religion.[265] One of the interviewees, Linda, a practitioner in a project of a civil society organisation that works to prevent and reduce racism, polarisation and extremism through religious dialogue in schools, for example, says this quite explicitly. She tells me that the project was shaped by a critique of the way religion is taught in the school system, which often portrays religion as a package, an immutable system. In her view, a way to prevent radicalisation is to emphasise that religion is not a matter of rules or authorities, but more specifically about having an own story, a personal view on one´s own religion. They work to strengthen young people's personal stories and encourage them to say, 'I don´t know everything but this is what it looks like for me, and I think this is important'. Encouraging them to speak about their own personal religion is a way to present a picture of religion that is based not on rules or dogmas, but on personal elements, which further is thought to prevent extremism. That is to say, religion is rooted, most fundamentally, in an inner and personal relation to the religious tradition. Below is some of what she said about her work with dialogue in schools, which clearly emphasises a personalised story concerning religion:

> A common thread is that everybody works with their own story. What can I tell, what do I want to tell, what is my story? And they visit schools in a school programme […], a storytelling programme. […] And that is preventative work too. To give young people […], to tell their own story about how it can be. How I grew up with my religion and what problems I identify within this religion. But also, to tell them something nice that others need to know, like, how to celebrate Ramadan or why that is important to me.

In the quotation above, religion is linked discursively to having an 'own story', that is, to something individual and personal. The work is about giving young people the opportunity to tell 'their own story', in contrast, for example, to a communitarian story. It is about the individual's own private story, not about what scripture says or what a religious authority has decided.

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[265] For a partly similar critique of religion as a system in social work research that also endorses a slightly more subjectivist view of religion, see Marcus Herz and Philip Lalander, '"Unaccompanied Minors" in Sweden Reflecting on Religious Faith and Practice', *Journal of Youth Studies* (2020): 1–15, https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2020.1800612; Elin Ekström, Pia H. Bülow and Monika Wilinska, '"I Don't Think You Will Understand Me Because Really, I Believe": Unaccompanied Female Minors Re-Negotiating religion,' *Qualitative Social Work* 19, no. 4 (2020): 719–735, https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325019848481.

This is perhaps most clear in the final sentence where she mentions Ramadan. Ramadan is linked to the personal, 'why this is important to me', as she phrases it. According to my interpretation, the religious is here linked not merely to something personal, but also to something reflected on. If I am to have a personal idea of why I celebrate Ramadan, then practice and tradition become a matter of individual choice and contemplation. Another of the interviewees, Anne, who also works with a school project related to religion and faith with the purpose of reducing stereotypes and oppression such an extremism, expresses a similar vision. An important part of her project is to visit congregations and let the students become familiar with many different religious traditions:

> We visit different religious temples. And we want to meet someone who can tell us their own … I mean, to give us a personal tour in this temple. That it is not about, 'well our leader says this,' but what *I* feel when I am in here. That which is important to *me*.

Here it is not the systematic or official expressions of religious congregations and religious traditions in general that are important but the individual's personal experiences. The spokesperson for the congregation is supposed to give a 'personal tour', and Anne clarifies that the purpose is not to talk about what leaders or authorities say, but what 'I feel when I am in here'. The tacit assumption is that religion is here being linked to emotions, feelings and sentiments; what I *feel* when I am in here. Both the personal 'I' and the word 'feel' are crucial in my interpretation here, for they mark a theological position that identifies the religious with the private and the emotional.

A similar analysis of another part of the material reveals how ideology is linked and related to personal convictions and inner inclinations. The practitioners tell me that their work often takes the form of building a resilient community that is supposed to provide young people and people at risk of becoming radicals with an alternative to radicalism. The alternative, in many instances, is *democracy*. Democracy becomes a *nodal point* in the material, to use the terminology of Ernest Laclau and Chantal Mouffe,[266] and many of the interviewees tell me that their work is more directed at promoting democracy than at preventing extremism. The analysis shows that the term 'democracy' is linked to signifiers such as personal responsibility, active citizenship and in broader terms, to ideas about personal reflection. It seems as though it is not any democracy but a kind of *deliberative* democracy that is being endorsed and promoted. In the deliberative model of democracy, citizens are treated not merely as

[266] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London: Verso, 1985).

addressees of rights but as authors of democracy, with an emphasis on the active aspects of citizenship.[267] The deliberative model of democracy has been quite popular in the school system,[268] and it seems to be so also within social work and preventative work against extremism, as analysed here at least. We can notice within the context of a deliberative idea of democracy an emphasis on personal reflection and inner inclinations.

Let me illustrate this point with a quotation from one of the interviewees, John, who works with conflict resolution in a civil society project with the goal of preventing extremism and promoting democracy. When asked about how he works to cultivate democracy, he says:

> Quite often, as young people, they are so much into themselves, thinking about what society owes them, but [they] never talk about their own obligation to society. What is my role in this community? […] What can I do to contribute to this society, even the smallest thing? How can I make sure that the street I live on, the streets are clean? If they are not clean, how can I motivate others to clean the streets, to make sure that we clean the streets? […] Those are the kind of conversations that […] are about responsibility, individual responsibility. Not a collective one but individual.

What is expressed here, in my interpretation, is that the route towards a functioning democracy lies in the promotion of individual accountability and engagement. He says that the individual is responsible, which means that democracy is linked to something personal and private. He adds, in the final line of the quotation, that he is not talking about collective responsibility but about personal responsibility.

John further clarifies by stating what he wants to discuss with clients and with people he meets in his work: 'What is my role? So those kinds of conversations, when you do them quite often, it depends […]. Because it is all about, it's all about, you know, finding ways to get them to think. To be more critical about themselves'. The final sentence in this quotation is illuminating, I think, for it asserts that promoting democracy is about being critical of oneself. In other words, democracy and resilience against extremism is here linked to personal scrutiny, to self-reflection. Contemplation, it seems, is an important aspect of the development of a democratic society. One possible corollary of such a view is that democracy is not simply to live unreflectively

[267] Jürgen Habermas, 'Three Normative Models of Democracy,' *Constellations (Oxford, England)* 1, no. 1 (1994): 1–10, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8675.1994.tb00001.x.

[268] See Susanne Dodillet, 'En skola I samhällets tjänst eller för individen? Om relationen mellan politik och politik i skolans styrdokument sedan 1940-talet,' *Statsvetenskaplig tidskrift* 121, no. 4 (2019): 683–710; Mikael Carleheden, 'Fostran till frihet: Skolans demokratiska värdegrund ur ett habermasianskt perspektiv,' *Utbildning och Demokrati* 11, no. 3 (2002): 43–72; Lovisa Bergdahl, 'Seeing Otherwise: Renegotiating Religion and Democracy as Questions for Education' (PhD diss., Stockholm University, 2010).

according to democratic rules, but involves reflecting on democracy and coming to personal democratic conviction.

Another of the interviewees, Zoey, is a political scientist who has worked in government projects related to violent extremism, and also in projects that are concerned with developing and cultivating democracy. She elaborated on how to work with promoting democracy, understood here more clearly as an ideal:

> But I try to sow seeds like that, you could say. I try to bring in that sort of idea, and that goes back to thinking about what kind of person one wants to be and how I want others to be towards me. And from that to think about what that means in my everyday life, and what it means when a society is made. That you try to bring these questions from the small scale to the big picture, and back to the small again. To spark that sort of thinking in the young people [I meet]. Because then you create much better preparedness, tools and intellectual possibilities to handle situations where you get mistreated or there is abuse or things don't work or you end up in, where someone is cheating or when you can see that, well here is some kind of camaraderie […]. I mean, people favour each other in an inappropriate manner. How can I relate to that? How can I find ways to cope with that? So, I try to inspire that sort of thinking in my conversations with young people. To strengthen their faith that there are possibilities in the democratic way.

Here too is it noticeable how a discussion on democracy is tied to reflections about what kind of person one wants to be. Democracy is further associated with reflection and how one can, in mundane or everyday life, be democratic. That is, democracy is not limited to a government system or a particular way of life but is linked to the inner convictions of the democrat. With a bit of a subjectivist twist, Zoey adds at the end, when discussing camaraderie: 'How can I relate to that? How can I find ways to cope with that?' She further adds, in the final instance, that it is important to strengthen the faith in the democratic system, as a way to cultivate democratic ideals. Signifiers such as contemplation, individual responsibility and conviction are being linked to the term 'democracy' in the quotations analysed here.

With reference to Lindbeck's typology, it could be noticed that even democracy is understood in expressivist terms here. To become a democrat is not merely to adopt or accept democratic rituals and practices; it also entails personal reflection, and democracy is achieved, partly at least, through a form of introspection and deliberation. One of the interviewees, Sara, who works together with Margarethe in a school of democracy, says that 'one of the most important [purposes with this school] was to give the young people knowledge about democracy and human rights and to give them tools to become engaged in democratic processes'. She emphasises further that when

working to prevent extremism, one should begin with democracy and, specifically, 'to make [young people] involved'. To become a democrat is to become an *active* participant in the democratic process. How this is to be achieved is elaborated by Sara´s colleague, Margarethe. Margarethe associates democracy not merely with personal engagement but with a belief in the *prospects* of democracy. We see this when she describes her work with a school of democracy. As a way to prevent radicalisation and to promote democracy, she tries to work with the way participants relate to their own experiences of being structurally marginalised. She invites people from the same neighbourhood as the participants – a marginalised suburban area – and lets them tell their story of success; how they managed to be successful or follow their own dreams, despite being from a marginalised neighbourhood. Their stories of success are supposed to inspire young people, to make them chose the democratic way.

She elaborates by telling me that 'one theme that we had with us also was: How can they make their voices heard, without saying that everyone is shit. Or that all of them are racists. […] How can they make their voices heard. So that was one theme we worked with: how can you present your opinions so that you don't end up in an even worse place'. Her main work in this regard is to 'to give them hope and show that … Because they tend to drag each other down. And to show [them] how the democratic works […] And that there are racists, that there are Islamophobes, but that one can make it anyway'.

When put into context, when understood as a strategy to foster and cultivate democracy, which is the purpose of the school according to the interviewee, then becoming a democrat is here linked to the subject's belief in their prospects if they accept democracy. Becoming a democrat means realising that anyone can make it; that one can succeed despite racism, poverty or other structural impediments; and that one should rise up and face these difficulties with political means.

Perhaps the most obvious illustration of a subjectivist understanding of democracy is found in the following quotation from Mary, the leader of the projects in which Anders and John work, when explaining an aspect of their work:

> Which we are working with because we have something called [project name, about young people's voices], where we collect, we interview different young, children and young people around the city; What is democracy to you? So, in our Instagram we post […] every Tuesday, young people's voices. And so, a young person who tells them about their voice, related to democracy. And also, the [field workers] when they visit leisure centres, they have a document with questions that they should address, amongst these: What is democracy to you?

The final words in the quotation particularly catch the eye: What is democracy *to you*? She appears to me to be introducing a reflexive twist in the democratic process: a democrat has their own idea about what a democracy is, their own idiosyncratic democracy, which is similar to the way Ramadan was conceived of above. This implies that it is by talking about the subject's own ideas about democracy that democracy is cultivated.

Although I am not trying to formulate a critique of this view on democracy, one could with Robert Pfaller's help suggest that becoming an active citizen is not unequivocally a liberating strategy; it may equally be understood as a process of interpellation. Pfaller says, 'if we take seriously Althusser's idea that becoming a subject is one of the key mechanisms of ideological subjugation, then becoming an *active subject* cannot be turned into any universal political solution'.[269]

Nevertheless, let me sum up. I have noticed that democracy often becomes a preferable alternative to extremism: it becomes that towards which the work is supposed to strive. Many of the interviewees say that their work is more about cultivating democracy than about preventing extremism, but clearly, the two are interlinked in the material. Democracy is at the other end of the spectrum, as it were. This is clearly expressed by Zoey above, who says that democracy is the 'antithesis' of violence. That is to say, democracy is always non-violent or non-extreme, despite the many examples in history to the contrary. My point with this comment is not that their views of democracy are incorrect. What I suggest is that such a belief in democracy as the non-violent ideology par excellence further motivates a kind of innerness when it comes to democratic ideology: promoting democratic values also entails a vision of democracy as the most fundamental ideological or political system. This is achieved, as we have seen, by promoting active citizenship and inner belief in democracy.

The empirical analysis conducted here thus suggests that religion and ideology are construed through a kind of expressivist lens. When trying to counter extremism, practitioners tend to target the subject's engagement, or try to alter their inner beliefs by substituting an inner extremist disposition with an inner democratic one. This approach becomes meaningful if one assumes that it is the belief itself that needs to be changed. In what follows, these assumptions and preconceptions are problematised, dispelled as it were, with the help of literature on theological and philosophical history that shows that such a position is by no means natural or inevitable.

[269] Robert Pfaller, *Interpassivity: The Aesthetics of Delegated Enjoyment* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 4.

Historicising Modern Subjectivity

In work to prevent extremism and promote democracy, an emphasis on the subjective elements of both religion and democratic ideology is identified. Religion tends to be viewed as an expression of an inner inclination. The same goes for democracy, for the cultivation of a democratic ideology often means strengthening personal, reflective belief in democracy and its prospects. The grounds of expressivism are, according to my interpretation of the material, preconceptions or implicit ideas that guide practitioners in their work. However, historical analysis and the works of the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor show that there is nothing self-evident or natural about this line of reasoning. In his work, Taylor effectively historicises modern subjectivity – inwardness – by showing that what is now considered to be an ahistorical constant – an inner self – is a rather late product, emerging first in modernity where it has become more or less hegemonic. Taylor effectively problematises the whole idea that we have an inner self from which a religious commitment can arise. This is an important step towards a rethinking of the present of the sort I am engaged in here.

Beginning with his book *Sources of the Self*, Taylor aspires to write the history of modern identity. Hallmarks of modernity such as freedom, individuality and inwardness bring with them specific metaphysical or epistemic assumptions. These are, Taylor says, shared by all in a culture, although they remain tacit and hidden and 'sink to the phenomenological status of unquestioned fact'.[270] His goal is to bring these to the fore.

At its most abstract, Taylor tells us, '[o]ur modern notion of the self is related to, one might say constituted by, a certain sense […] of inwardness'.[271] We orient ourselves towards the idea that there is something within us, something real and tangible that we can cling to, something that we can call a *self*. We do so mainly through a demarcation between the outer and external world vis-à-vis an inner realm of thoughts, ideas and emotions, unpolluted and safeguarded from the external world. And yet, as natural and eternal as this idea may seem, Taylor suggests that such a distinction is far from self-evident. The philosophy of the ancient Greek philosopher Plato functions as an illustrative example of pre-modern, ancient subjectivity for Taylor.

By going back to Plato, Taylor is able to demonstrate that the demarcation between the inner and the outer is not timeless. Instead, the crucial distinctions for Plato are those between the immaterial and the bodily, or, more importantly, the eternal and the

[270] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1989), 17.
[271] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 111.

changing.[272] Although the subject strives for virtue, which with modern lenses would imply introspection and reflexivity or, more generally, a turning inwards, this was not the case for Plato. For him, although the subject in some sense turned inwards, it did so while also aspiring towards the eternal Good, which is *external*, is located outside of us.[273] Cultivating one's virtues is thus for Plato not principally a turning inwards but outwards, towards the eternal. The ramification is that the distinction between the internal and the external is not merely unimportant for Plato; it is fundamentally misleading. The point of analysing Plato is to show that no matter how much we may experience our inner selves as natural, historically, this has not always been the case. This means that any understanding that we have of our inner self is far from metaphysically innocent: it is founded upon certain specific assumptions.

Taylor further elaborates this claim by showing how the idea of the modern subject arose and gained ground. For Taylor, the apex of modern subjectivity, its most full accomplishment, is the Cartesian *cogito*. On the road from Plato to Descartes, however, stands Augustine.[274] Although inheriting central elements from Plato such as the Platonic *Ideas* (which for the Christian Augustine represent God's ideas), and retaining the dualisms of Plato such as eternal/changing, Augustine gives these dualisms a twist, a nudge towards an understanding of them in terms of internal/external.[275] For Augustine, 'The outer is the bodily, what we have in common with the beasts […] The inner is the soul.'[276] Despite being a Platonist, Augustine begins to develop the seed for modern subjectivity through this dichotomy, so natural to moderns; the distinction between the body and the inner soul. The project of finding truth is thus radically different in Augustinian philosophy compared to Platonism. For truth is no longer found by turning the gaze towards the outer, the eternal, but through introspection: 'our principal route to God is not through the object domain but "in" ourselves', as Taylor puts it.[277]

Augustine here represents an important step towards a modern subjectivity, as standing just between the pre-modern and the modern in Taylor's analysis. But it is Descartes who most fully accomplishes the move towards inwardness. Descartes is Augustinian in many ways, for example in his proof of God's existence which, just as for Augustine, begins with the inner self rather than with external things. However, although Descartes inherits much from Augustinian inwardness, he gives it a radical

[272] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 121.
[273] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 123.
[274] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 127.
[275] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 129.
[276] Ibid.
[277] Ibid.

twist and takes it in a new direction.[278] An important turning point in Descartes, as read by Taylor, is the rejection of teleology, instead opting for a mechanistic universe in which the body is objectified. Descartes thus proclaims that we realise our own immateriality, our 'soul' as it were, not by 'becoming absorbed in the supersensible', as for Plato, but by objectifying the bodily.[279] It is by focusing on the body, looking into it through introspection rather than away from it (towards the eternal or Good), that the soul is able to free itself.

What can be inferred from an analysis of Taylor is that there is no natural requirement for the way we orient towards and understand our selves. In a critical examination of the idea that religion always has a firm inner basis, Taylor's argument can be used to shed light on the fact that there is not necessarily an inner base *at all*, whether religious or otherwise. Taylor puts it quite well when he says that 'we come to think that we "have" selves as we have heads'.[280] In modernity, our inner self is as actual as our body parts. This move sets the stage, so to speak, for the later romantic movement by which religion essentially becomes a matter of feeling, of sentiment. However, study of Plato reveals that there is nothing self-evident about locating our self within us, for humans may equally strive towards the external and eternal. What Taylor draws attention to, which is useful for our purposes in social work, is that innerness can by no means be extrapolated into all forms of religious work, a point that is very important in a multireligious context.

Authenticity and Religion as Emotions

So, how has this turn in modernity come to shape our understanding of religion? I suggest here that religious practices in Western societies are often construed through the lens of authenticity. In this regard, there is a risk that Westerners, and social workers specifically for my purposes, adopt a triumphalist stance towards other religious traditions that fail to live up to this yardstick of authenticity. In order to work out a more nuanced and less Eurocentric vision, the ideal of authenticity should preferably be seen in a historical light.

This ideal of innerness described in the previous section takes on another guise according to Taylor, when it is later linked to originality and emotions: something deep within us that is to be expressed in our acts and choices. The romantics,[281] Taylor

[278] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 143.
[279] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 146.
[280] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 177.
[281] For a more detailed description of Romanticism, see *Tysk Romantik Vol. 2, Gudomliga komedier: Humor, subjektivitet, transcendens* (Göteborg: Glänta Produktion).

says, construe of nature and the divine as originating from within us: 'To have a proper moral stance towards the natural order is to have access to one's inner voice.'[282] Romanticism pushed individuation to its apex by adding the notion of a personal calling that is to be expressed in our acts. What the romantics added to modern inwardness is *originality*, our own unrepeatable individuality. This idea of individuality and originality has become so natural to us that we barely notice it.[283]

Taylor further elaborates on the claim of modern expressive selves in a later book, *A Secular Age*. In an attempt to refute a 'triumphalist' writing of history, a story where (scientific) knowledge debunked religious doctrine and sank in the knife in that ended belief altogether, Taylor explains some of the changes in the West that enabled a secular society. What he wants to explain is the 'move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace'.[284] Put differently, what Taylor is setting out to explain is how religion becomes a matter of justification and preference, rather than an encapsulating structure. By entering a realm of preference and justification, religion ceases to be seen as a lifeworld and become an option, and an option amongst many others. Taylor strikingly says: 'there are no more naïve theists, just as there are no naïve atheists'.[285] The fact that neither belief nor unbelief can be adopted naively is what marks the secular age.

At the heart of his analysis lies a transgression of subjectivity, the move from a porous to a buffered self. He proposes that the buffered, modern self relies on the distinction between the inner and the outer world. In the ancient world, we were believed to have porous selves: there were no clear demarcations between the inner and the outer. People could, at any time, be 'invaded' by dark spirits or demons.[286] In the same way, Taylor says, 'in the pre-modern world, meanings are not only in minds, but can reside in things, or in various kinds of extra-human but intra-cosmic subjects'.[287] The development of a modern encased core of the subject allows us, however, to take distance from and disengage ourselves from that which is external to us.[288] Let me use an illustrative example found in Taylor to explain the main differences between the porous and the buffered self. Taylor uses the example of melancholy and says in pre-

[282] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 370.
[283] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 376.
[284] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Massachusetts/London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 3.
[285] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 30.
[286] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 38.
[287] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 33.
[288] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 38.

modern thinking 'black bile is not the cause of melancholy, it embodies, it *is* melancholy. The emotional life is porous here again; it doesn't simply exist in an inner, mental space.'[289] What he means is that melancholy is not a representation of something inner, nor is it the cause of an inner, emotive experience; it is this very substance and thus something that the subject cannot detach itself from. This disengaged stance, however, becomes an option to moderns: moderns become shielded from this endless fear of being constantly susceptible to external forces by being allowed to retract to our inner selves.

In making his claim, Taylor notes the emergence of an ideal of civility, one that encompassed not merely issues of violence and war but also the development of ideals of self-control, of proper and polite manners.[290] What is crucial here is the emergence of discipline qua *self*-discipline, by which the elite ideal of civility was imposed on the wider strata of the population.[291] This implied an renewed emphasis on *will* in the form of a reworked Stoicism where the aim no longer was to eliminate the passions 'but to bring them under the instrumental control of reason' where they are 'controlled by the will'.[292] This is an important transition marking the contours of the buffered, disengaged subject.

Taylor further draws on Norbert Elias, arguing that intimacy was reworked by new ideals and norms that became something of class markers.[293] These new ideals reshaped intimacy by relegating our bodily functions to a small circle of individuals as our private sphere. When performed at the wrong time, our bodily functions became circumscribed by feelings of disgust, which meant that the barrier between the outer and the inner was further circumscribed by raising barriers against physical desires.[294] Disenchantment and the emergence of a secular epoch, as described by Taylor, was thus enabled and perpetuated by what Elias terms the *civilisation process*. Self-discipline in relation to the passions, but also to bodily functions, paved the way for introspection and the cultivation of an inner depth.

What can be deduced from these discussions in Taylor is that all of these transitions coalesce to a form of *expressive individualism*, or what Taylor refers to as the age of *authenticity*. By an age of authenticity, Taylor specifically refers to the

> understanding of life which emerges with the Romantic expressivism of the late-

[289] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 37.
[290] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 101.
[291] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 111.
[292] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 131.
[293] See Norbert Elias, *On Civilization, Power and Knowledge: Selected Writings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).
[294] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 142.

> eighteenth century, that each one of us has his/her own way of realizing our humanity, and that it is important to find and live out one's own, as against surrendering to conformity with a model imposed on us from outside, by society, or the previous generation, or religious or political authority.[295]

Taylor is striking in his argument that religion in the modern age is often construed through the lens of authenticity, of which the interview material discussed above is an example. This means that religion can never be imposed. As the interviewee Linda phrases it, 'religion is *not* authoritarian'. Religion, as commodities, become vehicles of self-expression. As Taylor explains: 'The religious life or practice that I become part of must not only be my choice, but it must speak to me, it must make sense in terms of my spiritual development.'[296] Taylor here offers an insightful comment on the privatisation of religion: not only is religion restricted to a particular space, but religion presents itself as the individual's own path for spiritual growth.

From Taylor's reasoning, it can be inferred that the notion of religion as emerging from the innermost core of the subject is not an ahistorical constant. Inner piousness is not the essence of religion as much as it is a *specific form* of religious practice that has become hegemonic in the Western modern world. This is important for our purposes because multicultural and post-secular social work operates within a plethora of religious traditions, and not all of them are grounded in a buffered metaphysics of the subject. What Taylor's investigation reveal to us is that the external or visible signs of religious practice, such as liturgies and rituals, are not of necessity grounded in an inner belief of the subject. These are not necessarily mere forms of expressions, ways to realise and manifest an inner calling. Practice, liturgy and communal organisation may very well be an irreducible part of the religious faith itself, not merely an expression of it. The conclusion to be drawn from Taylor's work is that inner faith and emotions are not necessarily the only way to understand religion.

If we do not take Taylor's argument seriously, there is a looming risk of confusion. Identifying certain markers of belief (clothes, rituals, books, which often are seen as markers of radicalisation in the field of preventing extremism) as reflecting the innermost desires of the believer may incorrectly lead practitioners to the conclusion that certain acts are signs of intensified religious conviction, or even of radicalisation, when in fact, this is not the case. And further, it may lead practitioners to try to alter the inner convictions of their clients, as if it is the beliefs that are the problem.

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[295] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 475.
[296] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 486.

Ex-Timate Subjectivity: Two Theoretical Examples

Before elaborating on an alternative to inner motivations in religious practice, I need to dig a little deeper into the assumptions presupposed in an expressivist understanding of religion. Expressivism assumes all too readily that religious traditions and cultures formulate religion as an expression of something inner, when in fact this is a highly modern/Western vision. In order to pave the way for an alternative that may be better suited to working with clients in a multireligious context, inwardness should be more thoroughly historicised and relativised. I do this here by drawing on the Canadian philosopher William Desmond and the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek, both of whom (can be said to) formulate an argument for a non-individualist understanding of religion.

Both Desmond and Žižek represent a view of the subject as a hole or void of sorts, in contrast to an encased core. Let me begin with Žižek. In a rereading of Descartes, Žižek reaches a radical insight concerning modern subject philosophy and the Cartesian *cogito*. (It should be mentioned here already that Žižek's interpretation differs greatly from how Descartes is portrayed by Taylor.) According to Žižek, it is Immanuel Kant who articulates what is really at stake in Descartes, and he does so by distinguishing the empty 'I think' from the synthetic proposition 'I think that …'. What is revealed in this distinction is that the subject is not a noumenal thing because, Žižek says, 'I think' is necessarily an empty proposition. The implication, according to Žižek, is that the subject is exactly this gap between the noumenal 'I' and my own understanding of it. Žižek points here to a paradox: the subject only has access to the phenomenal world while, simultaneously, identifying itself as thinking substance, as a noumenon. The subject is thus neither noumenal nor phenomenal, but an in-between or what Žižek sometimes call a *vanishing mediator*. 'This in-between', writes Žižek: 'the gap which separates the two and, in a way, precedes them – "is" the subject'.[297] The subject escapes its own gaze as it were, by its identification of itself as a noumenal being. On this argument, what constitutes the subject is not an encased core, but rather a kind of *lacking*. This lacking or void, Žižek suggests, '*is constitutive of the I; the inaccessibility to the I of its own "kernel of being" makes it an I'*.[298] Thus, even when defending Kantianism or Cartesianism, he does so not by defending the idea of an encased subject but by claiming that Descartes *really* identified the subject as a void, that the subject is, as he calls it, '*out of joint*'. (Žižek, in my view mistakenly, attributes these insights to modern philosophy, despite the fact that Augustine, amongst others,

[297] Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London/New York: Verso, 1999), 25.
[298] Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 14.

represented this view[299].) For our purposes, although the modern age is in some sense influenced by Descartes, exactly how to interpret Descartes in that regard is far from a self-evident or easy task.

So, what does Žižek mean by the term 'out of joint', one might ask? To use an analogy, Žižek's description of the subject has similarities to the makeup of a doughnut. Like a doughnut in which the hole in the middle is fundamentally what makes it a doughnut, despite being nothing at all,[300] so too the subject is a subject simply because it has no centre. With influences from the German idealist Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Žižek claims that subjectivity emerges in the form of an obstacle, an impediment to self-realisation, or for Fichte, the *Anstoss*. Subjectivity, Fichte argues, is a constant failure of the subject to actualise and realise itself, the persistent resistance that the subject experiences (e.g., the limitations of living in a finite body, or the existence of other consciousnesses). This resistance effectively becomes the 'I'. On this reading, '[i]n clear contrast to the Kantian noumenal *Ding* that affects our senses, *Anstoss* does not come from the outside, it is *stricto sensu* ex-timate: a non-assimilable foreign body in the very core of the subject',[301] Žižek says with appeal to his grand master, Jacques Lacan. To say things in less technical jargon, the subject can never fully identify with itself. This is also what Lacan's peculiar wordplay 'ex-timate' (inherited by Žižek) means: it is neither intimate nor external but, strangely enough, something within us that isn't us. It is at once intimate and external (ex-timate).

The intimate kernel of modern subjectivity, this buffered self in Taylor's work, is for Žižek an ideological concealment of the realisation that the subject can never be whole, that the subject fundamentally has a lack. This lack produces a kind of restlessness in us and allows us to break out of our habitual lives, in some sense to revolutionise them, which is the political implication of Žižek's subject philosophy. Incompleteness is not an obstacle to political emancipation for Žižek; on the contrary, it is the very defining trait of it. This means that Žižek here presents a homology between the purposes of critique of ideology and the task of psychoanalysis. The final goal of both critique of ideology and psychoanalysis is to make the subject aware of its own lack, its own incompleteness, for it is only by realising this lack that the lack becomes truly productive. This is not really my point here, however, since my investigation of Žižek's philosophy is motivated principally by a theoretical endeavour to investigate an alternative to the hegemonic buffered self: a radically empty subject.

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[299] For an elaboration of Žižek's mistake in brushing aside ancient philosophers in this regard, see Ola Sigurdson, *Žižek, Augustinus och zombie: Essä om subjektivitet och hopp* (Malmö: Eskaton, 2016).

[300] Ola Sigurdson, *Kritik av den extistentiella humorn Vol. 3, Gudomliga komedier: Humor, subjektivitet, transcendens* (Göteborg: Glänta Produktion, 2021), Chapter 9.

[301] Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (London/New York: Verso, 2013), 150.

Desmond's philosophy offers further support for questioning or problematising expressivism. Desmond suggests that porosity is metaphysical; an aspect of being itself. Instead of claiming that porosity is replaced by a buffered self, as Taylor does, Desmond's claim is that there is a more *original porosity* that defines the ontology of being as such. This porosity is understood and attended to differently in various epochs and cultures, even to the point of denial (of which the modern period can be said to be an example), but our primal porosity is merely concealed, never eliminated.[302] Thus, 'in the process of buffering ourselves we have not more truly realized our promise, in fact, to the contrary, we have reconfigured ourselves in forgetfulness, if not in mutilation, of the communication of the original porosity.'[303] The buffered self, as described by Taylor, is a mere rhetoric, an attempt to cover over the fact that there is no core at all.

For Desmond, original porosity implies being as a gift. In modern theories of sovereignty, as in the will to self-affirmation (or self-preservation), this received character of being, the patience of being (*passio essendi*), is ultimately concealed.[304] Desmond links porosity to the phrase in Augustine's *Confessions*,[305] *interior intimo meo*, which identifies God as our innermost kernel, more intimate to us than ourselves. In Desmond's reading, Augustine offers a way to understand the subject as radically foreign in our most intimate aspects of the self. The centre of ourselves is open: 'porosity is an opening, not only in us, but *of ourselves as an opening* […] The porosity is a kind of nothing, in that it is no-thing, but the kind of thing we are is subtended by this no-thing'.[306]

Desmond lists many examples of how this primal porosity manifests itself, for example, by being moved by an artwork, or laughing hysterically at jokes, or the involuntary blush (to Desmond, the fact that we blush even when alone means that we are always open and receptive).[307] This kind of porosity is not eliminated in the modern epoch but lingers on in us. When it comes to religion, and thus also of relevance for my purposes, Desmond presents a radically different picture from expressivism. As I read Desmond, religion is social and public rather than, as for expressivism,

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[302] William Desmond, 'The Porosity of Being: Towards a Catholic Agapeics. In Response to Charles Taylor,' in *Renewing the Church in a Secular Age: Holistic Dialogue and Kenotic Vision*, ed. Charles Taylor, José Casanova, George F. McLean and João Vila-Chã (Washington, DC: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2016), 283–305.
[303] Desmond, 'The Porosity of Being', 291.
[304] William Desmond, *The Intimate Universal: The Hidden Porosity Among Religion, Art, Philosophy and Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 214–217.
[305] Cf. Aurelius Augustinus. *Augustinus bekännelser*, trans. Bengt Ellenberg. (Skellefteå: Artos, 2010), book 1, see also Desmond, *The Intimate Universal*, 39.
[306] Desmond, *The Intimate Universal*, 211.
[307] For a more detailed description of humour as transcendence, as a phenomenon showing that we humans really are 'threshold beings' or primarily receptive, see Ola Sigurdson, *Gudomliga komedier*.

emerging from the solitary individual and personal preference. Even when retreating to our inner selves, we are simultaneously in communion with others (and/or with God). Desmond's term for this is *intimate universal*, by which he wants to draw attention to exactly this inner and intimate part of us that is not ourselves. If we take the example of prayer, what may seem like a self-retracting activity is for Desmond quite the opposite. Prayer is a form of communication with the divine through porosity. In relation to this argument, Desmond says that religion is ultimately communitarian and has to do with rituals and 'the entire ensemble of symbolic acts in which a sometimes secret sense of sacred ultimacy touches on, impinges upon, all the significant aspects of social life, politics included.'[308] Religion does not derive from inner convictions and emotions that are our own, but emerges only in public and social forms, from porosity. Intimacy is neither narcissistic nor autistic, but ultimately social and communicational.[309]

Desmond thus problematises the notion of the subject inherent in expressivism – the idea that there is an inner core of the subject – by claiming that even the most intimate experiences of our selves are still social experiences. Consider the phrasing: I am not alone, even when I am alone.[310] Desmond touches on something interesting here, an effective problematisation of the solitude of modern autonomy and expressivism by saying that there is no inner core, no solid personal and solitary ground from which inclinations and preferences can derive. This means, for my purposes, that one should not be too hasty in declaring that all religion is 'authentically' derived from a strong and encased subject, since there may not be such a subject anywhere, not even in modernity.

In both Desmond and Žižek there are indications of a radically different form of subjectivity to the one chosen by expressivists. The point of this excursion into modern subject philosophy is that if we cannot take the buffered self at face-value, as both Desmond and Žižek argue, then we should not be too hasty in assuming that religion in modernity necessarily takes on the form of expressivism. In working out a theory of religion fit for social work, one that can analyse and work with religions other than those that rest upon an inner faith, it is imperative to bring expressivism under the loupe as I have done here.

[308] Desmond, *The Intimate Universal*, 43.
[309] Desmond, *The Intimate Universal*, 51.
[310] Desmond, *The Intimate Universal*, 49.

Belief: Not Only as Content, But Equally as Form

Having demystified that which is taken for granted about religion, showing that it rests upon specific and by no means self-evident assumptions about human subjectivity, I shall now proceed to elaborate an alternative vision, a vision of religion that is not limited to expressivism. The goal is to provide social work with a theoretical ground to stand on in order to avoid the mistake of ascribing subjective faith to all religious citizens, as if this is the only possible form of belief. In Western modernity and Western Christendom, religion has become more or less synonymous with faith, but such an understanding of religion does not easily translate to other cultures or religions. In practical terms, this means that when working with religion, there is a risk that practitioners illegitimately assume that all religious practices spring from inner motives. When making such assumptions, practitioners risk becoming lost in analyses of inner motives when in fact the act of belief is motivated by something else entirely. But what is the alternative? What other forms of belief are there? To answer this question, I begin with the assumption that belief is not exclusively a matter of content, it is also of matter of *form*. When analysing religious beliefs in social work, one needs to be attentive not only to differences in the content, in *what* is being believed; one must also be attentive to the structure of the belief itself: of *how* someone believes.

The French philosopher Louis Althusser can be said to draw attention to a reverse relation between ideas and practice. He argues that we believe because we are immersed in rituals, not the other way around. This argument finds its home in his elaboration of the distinction between *base* and *superstructure* in the work of Karl Marx. Althusser suggests that superstructure can be divided into a repressive function (e.g., the police) and an ideological function. Ideology is produced through the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA), which contains practices and institutions that, despite having other official functions, have as their primary purpose producing subjects of submission. The most important function of the school, for instance, is to sort out and differentiate a populace, making some people workers and other superiors, for example. That is, ISAs secure class division. That is their most important task, and they do so 'behind a "shield" provided by the repressive State apparatus', Althusser says.[311] The implication of this emphasis on ISAs is that Althusser effectively inverts the relation between ritual and inner motifs. He holds that we believe *because* we are being subjected to ideology in the form of apparatuses. This is in stark contrast to expressivism, which maintains that we choose our apparatuses (a specific congregation, for instance) because of our strong inner proclivity. Althusser's inverting gesture means

[311] Louis Althusser, *On Ideology* (London/New York: Verso, 2008), 24.

that '[i]deas have disappeared as such (insofar as they are endowed with an ideal or spiritual existence), to the precise extent that it has emerged that their existence is inscribed in the actions of practices governed by rituals.'[312]

How does this work, one might ask? According to Althusser, we become immersed through the process of interpellation:

> [I]deology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way that it 'recruits' subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all) […] by that very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: 'Hey, you there!'.[313]

When turning around or stopping at this 'Hey, you there!', the subject is/becomes interpellated; it becomes this 'you' and recognises itself as it. This recognition is experienced as natural, as if it were 'me' all along that was being hailed, and thus, the subject gains a kind of 'inner' conviction, a predisposition to fulfil the roles assigned to it by ideological demands. Despite the example of police hailing, interpellation is not a discrete event; there is no point at which the subject emerges, in which a 'pre-subjective' individual is interpellated: we are *always already* interpellated, we are always already subjects, constantly addressed as consumers by commercial advertising or when applying for work, for example.

To give a more tangible example of this as related to religious practice, there is an interesting passage in Saba Mahmood's book on the female mosque movement in Egypt known as the Da´wa movement that illustrates an inverse relation between inner belief and external manifestations. Mahmood's analysis of the Da´wa movement gives further support to the Althusserian formula. In this piety movement, the act of praying takes the form of religious pedagogy, as it teaches the devotee humility and piousness. Religious practice is thought to produce and instil emotions and a relation to God which, through practice, become smoother, easier, almost natural. Thus, it is not that praying is done because of an inner desire to pray, but rather, the women in the Da´wa movement try to cultivate their desire to pray by engaging in matters that seems to have nothing to do with prayer, such as daily activities. By attending to these matters in a specific way, they were able to produce or instil a desire to pray 'until that desire became a part of their condition of being.'[314] This means that rituals do not by default signal an inner disposition, since rituals may be forms of disciplinary techniques or practices of the self. The shaping of the inner self here takes on the form of

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[312] Althusser, *On Ideology*, 43–44.
[313] Althusser, *On Ideology*, 48.
[314] Saba Mahmood, *The Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005), 124.

participating in 'public' rituals and, thus, desire is 'not the *antecedent* to, or cause of, moral action, but *its product*', Mahmood says.[315] As can be noticed, in both Althusser and Mahmood we get a radically different understanding of how liturgy relates to inner proclivity, seeing the former to be primary. Belief, in their reasoning, is the result rather than the cause of the act. On this reasoning, we can think of liturgies as being a form of ISAs; a plethora of linked activities and institutions that together produce inner inclinations. In relation to expressivism, one could argue with the help of Althusser and Mahmood that personal preference is the outcome of social and institutionalised activities.

A possible objection to Althusser's thesis, however, is that he too hastily assumes that interpellation is always successful, that ideology 'recruits them all', as he writes.[316] Slavoj Žižek has argued against Althusser in this regard, claiming that Althusser overlooks how interpellation is never really successful, but this does not mean that interpellation does not 'work'. Žižek says that 'there is always a residue, a leftover, a stain of traumatic irrationality and senselessness sticking to it, and that *this leftover, far from hindering the full submission of the subject to the ideological command, is the very condition of it*'.[317] Both Žižek and Althusser follow Blaise Pascal in his schema: 'Kneel down, move your lips in prayer, and you will believe',[318] or 'act *as if* you already believe, and the belief will come by itself',[319] but they interpret this differently. For Althusser, the subject is immersed or 'sutured' by ideology, whereas for Žižek, ideology functions exactly because the subject does not fully coincide with or obey to ideological demands.

By following the theory of Žižek more closely, one can see how not only is a reverse relation between practice and inner belief possible, but even how religion can in some cases dispense with a believing subject altogether. For Žižek, successful ideological interpellation is not a necessary condition. This becomes clear when analysing his theory of ideology. For Žižek, ideology is not what we think but what we do, sometimes despite knowing better. Whereas Marx sees capitalist ideology as dressing the real world of social relations in a cloak of abstractions, Žižek proclaims that ideology plays on a totally different court: that of practice.[320] To illustrate this point, Žižek argues that commodity fetishism operates differently than Marx anticipated: it is not

[315] Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 126.
[316] Althusser, *On Ideology*, 48.
[317] Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London/New York: Verso, 1989), 43.
[318] Blaise Pascal cited in Althusser, *On Ideology*, 42.
[319] Žižek, *Sublime Object of Ideology*, 38.
[320] Robert Pfaller, 'Where is your hamster? The Concept of Ideology in Slavoj Žižek's Cultural Theory,' in *Traversing the Fantasy: Critical Responses to Slavoj Žižek*, ed. Geoff Boucher, Jason Glynos and Matthew Sharpe (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 105–22.

the case that we believe in the commodity, but rather that we act *as if* a commodity has a value, although no one really believes that it does. We are, as Žižek puts it, 'fetishists in practice, not in theory'.[321] No one really believes in commodities, we all know that they have no value except for their usefulness, and yet we act as if they do. Žižek's analysis of Tibetan monks, of particular relevance to my theorisation on religion, can further elucidate this theme. Tibetan monks use what is known as a prayer wheel, with prayers inserted into the wheel. Praying is conducted by spinning the wheel. In Žižek's interpretation, the spinning of the wheel *is* praying, and the praying wheel *substitutes* for the monk in the difficult and tedious task of praying. The monk is free to indulge in 'the most dirty and obscene fantasies' while objectively praying.[322,323] It is this substitution, the liberation of tasks, that is ideology par excellence.

Žižek draws attention to the fact that there are forms of belief that no one really believes in. The belief has the structure of 'knowing better'. One is tempted to say that religion in some cases can dispense with subjective belief altogether. There is no need for a subject standing behind the act of belief; *the act of belief stands for itself*. The Tibetan monks do not necessarily believe because they pray, at least not in the Althusserian sense; rather, they are *relieved* of believing altogether, at least in a certain sense. The religious structure (e.g. the praying wheel) believes for them. On this note, it could be possible to even further problematise the idea that all religion derives from inner piousness. If social work is to take religion seriously, perhaps it needs to consider that religion is not of necessity structured by inner belief. According to Žižek, religion may very well be structured by disavowal.

In further working out an alternative to expressivism, I turn now to the Austrian philosopher Robert Pfaller. He draws a useful distinction between *croyance* and *foi*, or *Bekenntnis* and *Aberglaube*, translated as *belief* and *faith* respectively, that can clarify the potential mistake of assuming that all religions are structured according to an expressivist schema. Drawing on the work of the French psychoanalyst Octave Mannoni, Pfaller develops a binary pair of beliefs that may be useful in understanding religion, although this is not really his agenda. The expressivist form of belief is analogous to what Pfaller, drawing on Mannoni, terms *foi*. Faith is constituted by personal commitment. The formula 'I believe' is what constitutes faith. Against this, Pfaller puts another form of belief, one that can only take the form of suspension of belief,

[321] Žižek, *Sublime Object of Ideology*, 28.
[322] Žižek, *Sublime Object of Ideology*, 32.
[323] In an attempt to ward off critique, Žižek has emphasized that his treatment of Buddhist prayer wheels is not a critique of superstitious or inauthentic ritualistic Buddhism. On the contrary, he identifies a genuine core in this ritualism in the sense that 'following blind ritual and immersing oneself in theologo-dogmatic hair-splitting *is* pragmatically the most effective way to achieve the goal of inner peace'. Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, 110.

which he calls *croyance*. As paradoxical as it may sound, Pfaller is suggesting that there are forms of belief that no one really believes in personally. For instance, few profess to believe in tarot cards or horoscopes; these are often consulted with a negating passus. In Mannoni's phrasing: *Je sais bien mais quand meme* [I know quite well, but still …].[324] I know that horoscopes are silly, but I nonetheless must read today's horoscope.

Croyance is thus a form of delegated belief, always someone else's beliefs – the beliefs of another culture, another person, another epoch. To explain how *croyance* works, and why, Pfaller invokes Johan Huizinga's theory of play and suggests that it is the sheer recognition of something as *for its own sake*, as play, that we find it compelling. Pfaller, following the thread laid out by Žižek, argues that we delegate beliefs and to some extent even our own pleasures. Canned laughter is a recurring example in Žižek's and Pfaller's work. They propose that canned laughter in sit-coms is not really about invoking laughter, but rather and paradoxically about *relieving* us of the need to laugh. The TV laughs for us, just as the prayer wheel substitutes for the monks in praying.

But why on earth would we want to forsake our pleasures through delegation, one may ask? It is here that Huizinga's theory can shed some light. According to Pfaller, rituals, liturgies and myths function just like play in that they are endowed with a kind of 'sacred seriousness' which 'often works as a spell that holds players captivated, making it impossible for them to leave the "lucid sphere"'.[325] By being caught in play, we are also relieved of the 'tedious' tasks of ideology (which may, in some cases, be a pleasure). To be caught in the illusion of play gives us satisfaction, which is why delegated beliefs produce a kind of pleasure in us; the enjoyment of cheating the Big Other, the joy of being immersed in something silly and ridiculous.

Let me further elaborate on the differences between belief and faith as a way to ground my argument for a more refined understanding of the relation between inner motives and acts than is given by a subjectivist/individualist understanding. Mannoni uses Jewish culture to exemplify the difference between the two forms of conviction, stating that the Jews believed in many Gods but worshipped only Yahweh.[326] He is careful to clarify that faith is not solely a monotheistic form of belief. What separates the two is not the number of entities believed in. Faith is defined and separated from

[324] Octave Mannoni, 'Jag vet mycket väl, men ändå …', in *Den förnekade kunskapen: En introduktion till Robert Pfallers filosofi*, ed. Sverker Lundin and Tobias Wessely (Hägersten: Tankekraft förlag, 2019), 65–100.
[325] Robert Pfaller, *On the Pleasure Principle in Culture: Illusions Without Owners*, trans. Lisa Rosenblatt, Charlotte Eckler and Camilla Nielsen (London: Verso, 2014), 106.
[326] Mannoni, 'Jag vet mycket väl, men ändå', 71.

belief by its '*unconditional commitment.*'[327] Translated into psychoanalytical terms, Pfaller suggests that Mannoni, through his distinction, is able to explain the real difference between the Freudian *superego* and the Lacanian *symbolic*. In Freud, the superego is all-knowing: it knows all the desires and thoughts of the subject and 'punishes the individual with guilt not only for their deeds, but also for their wishes and intentions'.[328] The symbolic, on the contrary, is not the realm of an omniscient observer but of the *naïve* observer: an observer who is easily duped and who 'judges exclusively on appearances'.[329] The crucial difference between the two is that whereas *foi* structures our innermost desires and thoughts, *croyance* is the production of appearances. The two forms also adhere to two different economies of affection. In *croyance*, as we have seen, we find pleasure in cheating, but with *foi*, we gain no such pleasure (since we do not cheat). So, if not pleasure, then what does *foi* offer us that makes it worth staying true to our tedious tasks? Pfaller's answer: joy is transformed into self-esteem and a sensation of being among the true believers, the 'enlightened' ones, and 'as long as the faithful feel superior to their seemingly ignorant others, they enjoy their feeling of supremacy, and maybe develop some more or less brutal missionary or pedagogic zeal'.[330] In Pfaller's view, narcissism and self-esteem could very well be the main causes of radicalisation processes, rather than the content of the belief itself (the ideology).

Pfaller's distinction between *foi*, which amount to an expressivist schema of subjective and inner belief, and *croyance*, this paradoxical belief through disavowal, allows us to break out of an expressivist blind spot. He clarifies that not all religious or ideological expressions have an inner basis. In fact, ideology is often comprised of *croyance* which, under certain circumstances, develops into *foi*. In other words, from a sea of delegated beliefs emerge islands of true inner belief. All of the above thinkers thus, in their own ways, draw attention to the problem of assuming that religion always rests upon inner conviction. Althusser, Žižek and Pfaller all acknowledge that other forms of belief still coexist, albeit rarely acknowledged as such. Althusser gives us an inverted understanding of faith, as produced through the act of interpellation. Žižek radicalises this argument by showing that there are forms of belief that can dispense with subjective faith altogether. But it is in Pfaller's term *croyance* that I find the most compelling argument that even in atheistic cultures, renounced beliefs still

[327] Pfaller, *On the Pleasure Principle in Culture*, 48.
[328] Pfaller, *On the Pleasure Principle in Culture*, 55.
[329] Pfaller, On the Pleasure Principle in Culture, 55.
[330] Robert Pfaller, 'How the Other Becomes Our Beast: Postmodernity's Production of Ressentiment: A mode d'emploi in Six Steps,' in *The Polemics of Ressentiment: Variations on Nietzsche*, ed. Sjoerd van Tuinen (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 135.

remain. Anything from mild superstition to magical thinking such as having an amulet or a piece of attire that (supposedly) brings a football player luck are examples of how belief still lingers even in atheistic cultures. However, these suspended beliefs are rarely acknowledged as such because of their very nature: they are always suspended, delegated to someone else.

Seen in this light, the practices described above of promoting inner faith in the democratic process and the assumption that religion really is about private emotions turn out to be somewhat problematic or insufficient. Within an expressivist theory, these practices make sense. If, however, one assumes that participation in rituals or liturgy can have a variety of functions for the believer including social, cultural, and psychological functions (as for Pfaller in his argument about self-esteem), then looking for perspicuous markers of inner inclinations may be a waste of time and energy.

Being Blind in One Eye

All of the thinkers above can help us put a finger on the radically social, practical and lived character of religious beliefs. Religion, rather than being the result of personal preference, is shaped and moulded in a context of practices, liturgy and institutions/communities which, under certain conditions, may produce personal preference. In working with religious citizens, it is pivotal not to make religion synonymous with inner belief, since that would make practitioners blind to other forms of belief or, even more problematically, adopt a triumphalist stance towards other religions by seeing inner devotion as religion *par excellence*. The previous section showed that there are forms of belief that cannot easily be described as authentic. In other words, although Taylor is likely correct in asserting that expressivism is hegemonic in the secular West, this does not mean that this is all religion is. The objective part of religion should not be overlooked since all believing is most likely constituted of both subjective and objective aspects.

Why then, are practitioners so keen to identify a reflective subject behind every act of belief? And further, what are the practical implications of identifying only faith and not belief? Žižek offers a potential answer to these questions in his argument for a Christian materialism, which is underwritten by his critique of spirituality. What Žižek elucidates with his reasoning for my purposes is both a rethinking of the essence of religion and an explanation to the cotemporary privileging of spiritual religion, as with expressivism. Beginning with the former, Žižek says that to assume that spirituality is the genuine core of religion is to secretly privilege a specific kind of religion. Even more problematically, this version of religion harmonises with and even abets capitalism. Let me clarify his point. Žižek has shown a persistent interest in theology,

albeit from a Hegelian perspective. This has the implication that he privileges Christianity, seen as the most accomplished form of religion. Žižek is thus (not so) secretly a triumphalist who argues that Christianity holds the genuine insight of religion.[331] In his own version of Hegelianism, the genuine creed of Christianity is atheistic, since it is founded upon the realisation of God's death and impotence. This is less of a concern for me, however.

Despite his own (apparently futile) attempts to reinvigorate a Hegelian reading of Christianity, Žižek says that his Hegelianism has today gone out of style. His enemies are post-colonial theorists who, according to Žižek, portray his reading of religion as a neo-colonial privileging of Christianity. According to these post-colonialists, Christianity (in a Hegelian reading) is something like whiteness: the presupposed normality against which all other religions are merely distortions.[332] Žižek's reproach is that there is nothing scandalous about this. He says that every religion contains within it a notion of what true religion is, and so all universal concepts of religion are secretly particular. Of interest to my argument here is that Žižek inverts a critique of Hegel by saying that it is in fact the New Age influenced, post-colonial or post-secular separations of religion and spirituality, which are intended to safeguard against triumphalist readings of religion, that privilege a particular form of religion. It is not the Hegelians but the post-colonialists, those who try to work beyond the privileging of a specific religious form, who secretly endorse one themselves, although behind a cloak of abstractions. 'The idea', Žižek writes, 'is that all religions presuppose, rely on, exploit, manipulate, etc. the same core of mystical experience' and '[s]piritual meditation, in its abstraction from institutionalized religion, appears today as the zero-level undistorted core of religion.'[333]

Turning to the second point, one might ask why spirituality is gaining so much ground? Why are all of these New Age advocates, post-colonial and post-secular theorists secretly endorsing spiritual religion? The answer given by Žižek, who often returns to this argument in his writings, is that vague spirituality harmonises with a capitalist logic. For Žižek, spirituality is a fetish. A fetish is something that allows you to maintain a realistic view of reality by providing an embodiment of this reality's disavowal. You can accept the death of a loved one only when you have some of their belongings that comfort you, that allows you to forget that they are dead, something

[331] Ola Sigurdson, 'Hegel *redivivus*: Žižek, teologi och religion,' in *Žižek som samhällsanalytiker*, ed. Anders Burman and Cecilia Sjöholm (Hägersten: Tankekraft Förlag, 2018), 119–138.
[332] Slavoj Žižek, 'The Fear of Four Words: A Modest Plea for the Hegelian Reading of Christianity,' in *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectics*, ed. Creston Davies (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2009), 27.
[333] Žižek, The Fear of Four Words, 27–28.

to which you 'can cling to in order to cancel the full impact of reality'.[334] In the mad dance of capitalism, spirituality offers exactly this: Western Buddhism 'enables you to participate in the frantic pace of the capitalist game while sustaining the perception that you are not really in it', and that 'what really matters to you is the peace of the inner Self to which you know you can always withdraw', Žižek says.[335] Western Buddhism is thus in secret liaison with capitalism: it offers you something to cling to, something that can allow you to find meaning in an otherwise hopeless and meaningless world.

Žižek is highly critical of a spiritualist view to religion, which in my view would make him equally critical of expressivism since it shares much of the spiritualist view on religion's essence. Žižek's reproach to expressivism when it comes to Christianity is that Christianity's genuine core is not vague spirituality but political organisation. By realising this, religion can be revitalised, it can come into conflict with a capitalist ethos and thereby expose its injustices. To understand what is at stake here, consider the following quotation:

> One can now understand why the Dalai Lama is much more appropriate for our postmodern permissive times: he presents us with a vague feel-good spiritualism without any *specific* obligations: anyone, even the most decadent Hollywood star, can follow him while continuing his or her money-grabbing promiscuous lifestyle …. The Pope, in contrast, reminds us that there *is* a price to pay for a proper ethical attitude.[336]

Žižek wants to retrieve a more radical core of Christianity, a potentially polemical and conflictual form of religion. Vague spirituality on the other hand, does not come into conflict with anything since it does not place any confines on the believer; the believer may continue to live a sinful and exploiting lifestyle while remaining a spiritualist. What strikes me is that Žižek, at least when writing about Christianity, inverts the expressivist idea, saying that it is the institutionalisation, the organisation or the community of believers that is the genuine core of Christianity. In one of his books, he actually names this the *perverse core* of Christianity. The core of Christianity is all the rituals and the organisational and social aspects, not inner piousness. In this argument, Žižek proposes that conceptualising religion as essentially spiritual is itself an ideological concealment of religion's potentially conflictual and subversive nature.

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[334] Slavoj Žižek, *On Belief* (London/New York: Routledge, 2001), 14.
[335] Žižek, *On Belief*, 15.
[336] Slavoj Žižek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism? Five Interventions in the (Mis)use of a Notion* (London/New York: Verso, 2001), 181.

What is relevant to the argument made here is that although spirituality or inner piousness may be an important constituent in many religious traditions, it is not necessarily the essence of the religious. From Žižek's point of view, religion is ultimately a matter of practice and of community. What survives from the death of God on the cross, which according to Žižek is not the death of the incarnated God but the death of the God beyond (noticeable, Žižek says, in the phrase; Father, why has thou forsaken me?[337]) is the Holy Spirit.[338] But the Holy Spirit, for Žižek, is in fact the community of believers itself. The core of religion, on this reading, is thus organisation, community and practice. That which is often referred to as the 'excess' of religion is really its core. That is to say, Žižek paints a picture of religion that is drastically and ultimately social and public, institutional and practical. In working out a theory of religion as lifeworld, Žižek's argument that Christianity is materialist thus deserves its place.

Pfaller throws more light on the issue that some concepts of religion secretly endorse a specific form of the religious.[339] He suggests that what he calls faiths (*foi*) are naturally antagonistic towards objective belief, which he terms *interpassivity*. In Pfaller's view, the constant striving for purity, the constant attempts to strip faith of its interpassive elements make expressivist religions (Protestantism is often Pfaller's target) naturally hostile towards beliefs, so that they have difficulty identifying beliefs. As mentioned already, Pfaller suggests that faith instils self-esteem in the believer. The only way that faith can instil self-esteem is to deny and reject all of its interpassive elements, so declaring its unconditional commitment to the object of belief. Faith, at its core, is ascetic and tries to rid a culture of all its interpassive elements, which are seen as nothing more than a distraction from the one true faith.[340] Pfaller elaborates:

> [T]hose elements appearing in all religions that can be described as 'behaviouristic',

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[337] Matthew 27:46.

[338] Žižek, 'The Fear of Four Words', 33.

[339] There is, however, an important difference between Pfaller and Žižek with regard to their critique of spiritualism or faith which has to do with their respective theologies. Whereas Pfaller is deeply troubled by Protestantism, seen as having invented personal convictions (and as denying objective belief), Žižek is basically a Lutheran, hence untroubled by unconditional commitment (as noticed above concerning the Pope). I try to draw conclusions from both of them for my own argument on secularism in social work, but this does not mean that I think they represent the same position. For critical examinations of Žižek's theology, see Ola Sigurdson, *Theology and Marxism in Eagleton and Žižek: A Conspiracy of Hope* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Roland Boer, *Criticism of Heaven: On Marxism and Theology* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2006), Chapter 7; Marcus Pound, *Žižek: A (Very) Critical Introduction* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2008).

[340] According to Pfaller, what Weber was able to show in his *Protestant Ethic* is how asceticism was secularised. That is, what was transferred from a theological context over to a secular one was asceticism itself, which was now understood in immanent terms. Pfaller explains: 'Only now does the full momentousness of Max Weber's answer become understandable: neither science nor philosophy cause the "disenchantment of the world". Instead, it is religion: the internalisation-oriented religion of Protestantism is supremely hostile to the external practices proper to magic. And this Protestantism can be so radically internalised that it does not even have to be aware of its own religious nature'. See Robert Pfaller, *Interpassivity: The Aesthetics of Delegated Enjoyment* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 9.

> although usually painstakingly followed, are regularly explained by their practitioners as being something that is certainly part of their religion, but nonetheless not the real heart of the matter. These dismissed elements (that is to say: the majority or even all of a religion's rituals, as well as all of its myths) would accordingly make up the required share of *croyance*; and conversely, that which this dismissive gesture aims to make more precise would be the share of *foi*.[341]

A culture that emphasises faith (e.g. a Western one) cannot identify interpassive behaviours as belief; it must deny these their existence, saying that these are nothing but distortions of the one true religion. This argument lines up perfectly, I think, with Žižek's critique of spirituality: In order for religion to be reduced to spirituality, the interpassive elements must be overlooked or identified as nothing but 'distractions' or the negligible 'excess'. Even more importantly, Pfaller puts a finger on the potential downsides of assuming that religion really is about inner emotions and beliefs, as noted above in the empirical analysis. From this perspective, expressivism is not merely a theory of religion; it is prescriptive and performative in the way it formulates religion in apolitical terms.

Pfaller is able to further describe what may go wrong with having preconceptions about religion solely as faith. He asks the following in relation to the ancient Greek gods: How is it possible to believe in gods who do all sorts of amoral acts? They deceive and manipulate, and they submit to the lowest of emotions such as jealousy, injured pride and sexual desire, and yet they are worshiped.[342] How is this possible? His answer: the enigma first arises when we attempt to give an answer to this question in strictly epistemological terms. When considered as an intellectual problem, a belief in such gods seems preposterous. But when considered as a moral issue, the effect they have on a moral community, and that they embody *ideals* rather than myths, the enigma evaporates. Belief in the Greek gods had an important function: it promoted and facilitated a specific moral and communitarian order, despite the dubious character of the gods. Pfaller's answer to the question of how people could believe in these gods is simply this: No one did, at least not in the sense of having faith in them, but nonetheless these gods embodied culture and practice. Failing to identify this and recognise that gods or other objects of belief may have many different functions would make practitioners in social work blind in one eye, as they would impose their own notion of belief in regard to the "primitive" other, as it were.[343]

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[341] Pfaller, *On the Pleasure Principle in Culture*, 49.
[342] Pfaller, *On the Pleasure Principle in Culture*, 10.
[343] As Žižek remarks concerning Pfaller's work. See Slavoj Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2003), 6.

Taylor too elucidates the issue of wrongfully applying a concept to another culture or epoch, using the example of blasphemy. When trying to understand pre-modern practices in relation to blasphemy, moderns tend to inscribe into these practices their own understanding of the inclination to conduct rituals:

> Turning 'heretic' and rejecting this power, or condemning the practice as idolatrous, is not just a personal matter. Villagers who hold out, or even denounce the common rites, put the efficacy of these rites in danger, and hence pose a menace to everyone. This is something we constantly tend to forget when we look back condescendingly on the intolerance of earlier ages. As long as the common weal was bound up in collective rites, devotions, allegiances, it couldn't be seen just as an individual's own business that he breaks ranks, even less that he blaspheme or try to desecrate the rite.[344]

Rather than treating these practices as originating in the nominal individual, rituals have an intrinsic social aspect. What may seem like a personal matter is, from a different angle, a matter of public safety. The whole society was threatened by blasphemies, which made blasphemy a resolutely public issue.

What can be extrapolated from the reasoning above? If practitioners adopt an expressivist concept of religion in social work, there is always a risk that they will judge other religions with their own yardstick. Trying to impose one's own (latently Christian,[345] perhaps even specifically Protestant) worldview has its downsides, as one may potentially become blind in one eye. A potentially more productive understanding of religion would be to work from the presupposition that there is a dynamic relation between the personal and emotive and the communal, the objective and the liturgical.

Implications for Social Work

The analysis of the interview material at the beginning of this chapter suggested that religion, and democracy, are being linked to the personal and private, and also to the emotional, which I believe reflects a subjectivist and expressivist understanding of religion. In the analysis of how democracy is spoken of and promoted, it was noticed that democracy was subjectivistically conceived, most clearly in the way democracy was linked to personal responsibility and reflection. From the insight that inwardness is not an ahistorical or transcultural constant, this chapter has worked beyond these

[344] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 42.
[345] The very term 'religion' is intrinsically linked to Christianity, and Christianity has influenced the thinking of the Western world immensely. See Tom Holland, *Dominion: The Making of the Western Mind* (London: Little, Brown, 2019).

taken-for-granted assumptions about religion and ideology as linked to inner processes within the subject. In a Foucauldian vein, the task here has been to rework the present.

With Taylor, we have seen that expressivism rests upon a very specific metaphysical idea that we 'have' an inner soul, a form of individualism that also shapes an understanding of the essence of religion. Taylor historicises this metaphysical assumption, saying that it is neither timeless nor transcultural. By drawing on Desmond and Žižek, it was further suggested that the buffered self in Taylor is not as hegemonic as one may think. In fact, the buffered self is more a way to cover over a more original porosity, one that can never be fully healed. Modern affirmations of the encased subject are rhetoric, not ontology, according to Desmond. Desmond's alternative to the buffered self – that of an original porosity – is equally a vision of a fundamentally interdependent and communal/social human being.

What is relevant to practitioners from this reasoning is that it can be proposed that religious behaviour does not necessarily have an inner basis. The act of belief may stand for itself. Or, to put things differently, perhaps religion is not as individualistic as expressivists tends to depict it? In more practical terms, what the theories analysed here seem to suggest is that practitioners should be cautious in assuming that an act of belief is rooted in a personal commitment, for it may well be the direct opposite (as for Althusser, who argues that the act of belief produces identification and instils personal conviction).

Let me illustrate the problem of expressivism by taking an example from work to prevent extremism. Radicalisation is often understood as the internalisation of radical ideas which motivate extreme behaviours such as violence, often in the form of terrorism. It is even suggested that one of the root causes of radicalisation lies in a personal crisis, after which the individual begins to seek out radical ideologies that brings meaning to this crisis. In other words, radicalisation is to internalise or cultivate inner beliefs in a utopia and the idea that this utopia can be achieved through the use of violence. Radicalisation is seen as an inner process, a gradual commitment to violent Islam. In contrast to this, the argument can be made that (jihadist) ideology is an outcome rather than a cause of radicalisation. Within encounters between actors, certain conditions produce a path towards the use of violence.[346] The violence conducted within these encounters is retroactively given ideological support, which is mistakenly

[346] Donatella Della Porta, *Social Movement Studies and Political Violence* (Aarhus: Centre for Studies in Islamism and Radicalisation (CIR) Department of Political Science, Aarhus University, 2009); Martin A. Miller, *The Foundations of Modern Terrorism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Eitan Y. Alimi, Chares Demetriou and Lorenzo Bosi, *The Dynamics of Radicalization: A Relational and Comparative Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

conceived of as the cause of violence, when in fact it is a reflection and theoretical justification of violence *already conducted*.

To link back to the discussion above, if one wholeheartedly adopts an expressivist view of religion and ideology, the explanation for violence lies in the inner motives, wants, and wishes of the subject, the conviction that a specific cause is so important that violence becomes a possible means to realise a specific end (as in the academic discussions concerning religious terrorism, in which religion is depicted as a form of blind faith that leads to excessive and indiscriminate violence). But from the reasoning above, it is perfectly reasonable to assume that people conduct violent acts without being fully convinced of the justifiability or necessity of violence. As Žižek reminds us, ideology is not what we think, feel and want, but what we do, how we act. One may thus unproblematically be non-violent ideologically but still adopt violent means under certain circumstances. Violence is perhaps not so much a personal preference located in the hearts and minds of terrorists as much as it is an outcome of increasingly violent encounters and milieus.

To sum up this chapter, religion cannot be reduced to innerness, as if all religion is founded upon inner emotions or inclinations. What can be inferred from this discussion is that a productive way of understanding religion would be to acknowledge how inner emotions and inclinations are shaped and moulded in a context, and thus in relation to liturgy and communal organisation. There is a certain dialectic in regard to how inner emotions interplay with external behaviour. Realising this would perhaps minimise the risk of ascribing to clients or religious citizens an inner belief, when in fact this is not always so. In chapter 7, it is suggested that a productive approach to religion can be found in the concept *lifeworld*, which draws attention to the irreducibility of meaning and the fact that all our experiences, as well as our emotions, have a history and a social, cultural and even pragmatic component. From the argument thus far, it can be concluded that religion is neither purely intellectual nor exclusively solitary, preferential and emotional. Religion is communal, social, practical, lived. This also says something important concerning the tension in the field, as noticed in chapter 3, by which many of the interviewees are perplexed about whether it is religion or politics, or something else entirely, that motivates extremism. By identifying religion with something broader and more flexible than only inner conviction and emotion, this tension and perplexity may perhaps be resolved. When religion is construed of as communitarian and with political/universal aspirations, the line drawn between religion and politics is no longer as self-evident as it is from a liberal point of view. One does not need to choose between a religious/theological and a political

explanation for extremism or related social problems (which, I believe, is what has given the interviewees such headaches).

5. FREEDOM AND AGENCY IN A 'SUBMISSIVE' ACT

Now that we have concluded that religion is not exclusively innerness and feelings of the infinite, and that it also cannot be satisfyingly contained in official doctrine, it is time to turn to the relation between religious actions and freedom. The alternative way of conceiving religion that is sought in this dissertation, one that emphasises the situated and lived character of religious traditions, has certain implications for how we understand freedom. At its most fundamental, the concept of religion elaborated in this dissertation considers religion to be a horizon of meaning, one that precedes personal preference and individual choice. This means that freedom, from the standpoint of religion qua lifeworld, needs to be reformulated and assigned drastically different connotations to those it has in secularistic theories of religion. This chapter is devoted to investigating different understandings of freedom theoretically and empirically.

Let me begin by stating how freedom, in its Lockean variant, has shaped discourses on religion in modernity. In *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, the British liberal philosopher John Locke insists that 'the care of souls is not committed to the civil magistrate, any more than to other men [sic]. It is not committed unto him, I say, by God: because it appears not that God has ever given any such authority to one man over another, as to compel any one to his religion'.[347] In the interview material analysed in this chapter, a similar link between religion and an act of free choice is noticeable. This view is closely related to the idea of religion as inner inclinations, as discussed in the previous chapter. Religion, in this view, is not primarily liturgy, organisation or tradition, but inner desires that are to be realised in a free act. In working out a terminology for social work, some limitations in the way religion is being conceptualised principally or exclusively as a free choice are identified. Although I would

[347] John Locke, 'A Letter Concerning Toleration,' in *Two Treatises of Government and a Letter Concerning Toleration*, ed. Ian Shapiro, John Dunn, and Ruth W. Grant (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2003), 219.

certainly agree that religion, in some sense of the word, should be a free choice and should not be forced upon individuals, the argument can be made that the lenses of freedom of choice may lead to misunderstandings of particular religious practices.

The crux of the matter is that there is no one meaning of the term 'freedom'. What is meant when saying that religion is a free choice is often synonymous with a vision of a radically unimpeded act of choosing. But there are other ways of being free than being unimpeded in matters of choice. The risk of adopting too narrow an understanding of freedom is that some forms of religious practice may be identified as unfree, whereas the believers/clients do not view them as such. Some practices may be identified as being coercive when in fact they entail a form of agency, albeit of a different kind than the form of agency inherent in autonomy or free choice. Finding alternative ways to conceive of freedom is instrumental in avoiding such misunderstandings and misdirected interventions when it comes to social work, which in the worst of scenarios would entail 'liberation' of people who do not feel they need to be liberated. Western feminism and its relation to Muslim women is a paradigmatic example of potentially misdirected attempts to liberate with Westernised glasses.

This chapter thus digs deep into the concept of freedom seeking a better way to understand freedom than freedom as unimpeded choice. It begins with a brief empirical analysis of how freedom is linked to religion in work to prevent extremism and promote democracy. I then place the formulations I have identified in a historical context and show that they represent a very precise form of freedom with specific metaphysical underpinnings. After having historicised freedom of choice, a different understanding of freedom is elaborated, a vision of freedom that does not take an unrestrained will as its presupposition. Three philosophers are investigated in this chapter, namely Félix Ravaisson, Catherine Malabou and Paolo Virno, who all in their own way contribute to an understanding of freedom as emerging in harmony with interdependency and as enabled by tradition, liturgy and even discipline.

With the different set of lenses provided by these three philosophers, social workers would be able to work with religious citizens without imposing Western/liberal assumptions of free choice on them. Operating with narrow conceptions of freedom is likely to further fuel confrontational approaches to religion like that in chapter 3, in which assumptions or religious practices are condemned as inauthentic. Such a confrontational approach is, in my view, quite unproductive. Hence, identifying freedom in an act of tradition would be a more productive approach to religion in practical matters.

Against Authorities: Autonomy and Free Choice in Practice

The following analysis provides a picture of how freedom and unfreedom (e.g. fatalism or rule-following) are linked to religion and extremism in different ways within work to prevent extremism and promote democracy. Let me begin with my interview with Noel, an academic expert who has conducted research into Islamic philosophy and history, and who has also been a lecturer and consultant for practitioners in the field of extremism. When talking about his approach to the field of extremism and his contribution to practice, he suggests that it may be fruitful to discuss an issue that has long been debated in Islamic philosophy, namely whether humans have free will or whether their will is subordinate to God's will:[348]

> Yes so, I try to raise this that, if you talk about [extremism] from a strict theological perspective then it goes back to the 700s and the debates about whether humans are responsible for their actions, whether humans can, with their reasoning, determine what is good and what is evil and whether one's actions matter for one's future, so to speak. And here, you encounter two wholly separate ideas in Islamic theology, one that goes in the fatalist direction which takes all responsibility from the individual and places it in the hands of God, that a human's fate is predetermined, a perspective of predestination, and thus […], you have no responsibility for your actions. Even though the act itself can be perceived as nefarious by other people, so to speak. And then the other perspective that places all responsibility in the hands of the human. Humans have a free will and can distinguish what is good from what is evil by their own reasoning, and thereby become responsible. And that is the basis of the idea of judgement day, because at judgement day you are held accountable for your actions.

Noel considers this ancient debate to still be relevant in contemporary discussion of extremism and terrorism:

> And this is also the discussion we see today where recruits, not least from Sweden, who are asked: Why do you do the things perceived as reprehensible by everybody else, like exposing minor or adult women from ethnic or religious minorities to repeated rape, or desecrating fallen enemies' corpses or similar reprehensible acts. And the only response they give is: 'Well God has decided so. I am but a cog in the machinery, I do what I have been told'. My superiors have said this, but God has decided it. This is an argument that we encounter, and the counter-argument comes

[348] For a different and detailed description of free will and predestination in Islamic philosophy, see Maria De Cillis, *Free Will and Predestination in Islamic Thought: Theoretical Compromises in the Works of Avicenna, al-Ghazali and Ibn 'Arabi* (London/New York: Routledge, 2014).

> from more modern (you should be careful about using this word) but liberal theological [positions] […] And also other interpretations, which in themselves are quite conservative but still contradict the arguments of the violence-affirming Islamists, extremists.

He also explained how his knowledge of Islamic history and philosophy can contribute to work to counter radicalisation:

> So, these pairs, if you say, where the one says one thing and the other person responds to this from the opposite perspective, that is what I try to raise, to show that there is an internal discussion within a Muslim context, a variety of positions. But also, […] when you in social services or criminal correction and other areas encounter people who express these sorts of things, you will be able to poke holes in their theological/religious structure by showing that there are diverging positions.

In the quotation we can see how extremism and the horrific acts that are conducted in the name of Islam within some extremist movements are linked to a philosophical discussion on freedom. Fatalism, according to Noel, is a defence or a justification of these horrific acts. This also means that Noel, as I interpret his words, links extremism and fatalism more generally. He does not portray this as an exclusively Islamic or even religious issue. In fact, he pointed out that Nazi representatives similarly argued that they were nothing but cogs in the Nazi machinery. Extremism more generally is thus related to the issue of unfreedom, here in the form of fatalism, according to the interviewee.

Two things deserve to be mentioned about Noel's argument. First, although there are some striking similarities between how Noel talks about a strategy to use theological/philosophical arguments to prevent extremism and those excerpts that I analysed in chapter 3, Noel is careful to point out that this strategy is no 'quick fix'. It is not enough merely to point out to a radical or an extremist that there are other interpretations of freedom in Islamic philosophy. Secondly, Noel is not saying that the extremist or fatalist interpretation is incorrect. In fact, what he is saying is that there are *different trajectories* within Islam. Discussing a variety of interpretations with extremists may be potentially fruitful, as it provides scope for alternative positions.

These clarifications aside, we can see how Noel links extremism and unfreedom in the quotations above. I shall now further investigate how religion, extremism and (un)freedom are linked in work to prevent extremism and promote democracy. In analysing how religion is conceived of and talked about in the field, a certain notion of freedom is noticeable, one that is directly at odds not specifically with fatalism, as for Noel, but with *rules*. One of the interviewees, Anne, works for a civil society organisation with a school project whose purpose is to prevent prejudice, oppression,

conflict and extremism, as well as to promote human rights. This work is closely linked to issues of religion, and the organisation's work includes interreligious dialogue. An important part of Annes' work is arranging for school classes to visit religious congregations in an attempt to reduce the links often drawn in society between religion and extremism. The purpose of these visits is not, and she repeats this several times during the interview, to present a particular religious tradition, with its scriptures, dogmas, liturgy etc. Rather, these visits are supposed to offer a personal account on religion:

> And this is something that I find very important; bringing someone into the class who has a religious conception of life, who visits the class and tells them something. And something which is not about, 'Yes well, these are the rules which must be followed', but more personal. So, 'Yes, this is me; I am religious', but I practice judo too.

Religion is discursively related to the personal and, more importantly for the discussion here, to something other than rules. Religion, as portrayed in the above quotation, is not about rules but about something else, something personal. Anne further elaborates this view:

> And that it can be, it is supposed to be a personal tale and it is supposed to be some kind of connection to this person's religious faith somehow. And preferably, like we had the last time, we had a girl who told us about what it was like when she was in high school and wanted to be religious, she wanted to be a good Muslim. What she felt was a good Muslim. But at the same time, she wanted to be cool … yes, you understand that conflict. And then she comes into, well what it means for her to be religious, why she wants to be religious, what it gives her personally and so. So you get a personal picture of her experiences of it. We try to connect with the students … they recognise this of course but that you don't always know … And then we work with these issues in that theme.

Again, it is personal experiences that are emphasised here, even emotional elements, as discussed in the previous chapter in regard to expressivism. What matters for the discussion here is that her views on what constitutes productive work regarding religion is to emphasise that it is not about rules, scripture or official dogma, but about the personal.

She further expresses this view by stressing the links between religion and emotions in the following quotation:

> That we visit different religious temples. And we want to meet someone who can tell us their own … I mean, to give us a personal tour in this temple. That it is not about, 'well our leader says this', but what I feel when I am in here. That which is

important to me.

Again, she stresses the personal aspects of the religious. What particularly interests me is her insistence that religion is not about what the religious leaders say, which leads me to the conclusion that religion is here being linked to something non-authoritarian or non-coercive. Or more broadly, that religion is regarded as not so much about scripture or tradition but about individual choice and *preference*. The emphasis on preference is even more clear in the following quotation where she continues to elaborate on her work with the school project:

> That you can be religious in many different ways. And that there are different levels and that you must be able to regulate this yourself a little bit. The human rights, that it is your right to determine how … Because the students are very much like … I generalise now… 'yes, I have learned that in Quran school, so I know that is the case'. Yes, but what do you think? 'No but I say this and that' … So it's like, you don't really think … So we try to bring in the idea that, yes you have the right to decide and you don't have to be [religious] like this, you can also be [religious] like that. And that is a part of this whole, that a person comes in and tells them … from a position that is not … these are religious people, but like everyone else they have a specific interpretation which maybe is not exactly what is said officially in their congregation. But everyone does their own interpretation. The students are very much like: either you live like this or like that. Either it is good, or it is bad. Very much so. So we try to nuance that a bit.

Here Anne links religion and a person's right and ability to decide and to think for themself. Religion can be many things, not merely what is said officially in a congregation or what you have learned in the Quran school. Again, this is a subjectivist interpretation of religion, as analysed in the previous chapter, but what concerns us in this chapter is that religion is here linked to personal choice and decision, in contradistinction to rules and authority.

Another of the interviewees similarly speaks of religion as linked to the ability to choose and contrasts religion to authority and rule-following. Linda (who has a background as a Lutheran minister) works for another civil society organisation on matters related to extremism, but also more broadly with racism, polarisation and prejudices against religion. Part of her work is a school project that sets out to provide a different picture of religion to the one often endorsed in education with its emphasis on rules, scripture or pillars:

> As a pervading theme, everybody works with their own story: what can I tell you, what do I want to say, what is my tale? And they are out in schools in a special

> school programme […]. Two or three times a week. And that is a kind of preventative work too. To have young people, together with a coordinator, to tell their own story so to speak. How can that be? How I have been growing up with my religion and where do I see problems in my own religion … But also to say something nice that others need to know. Like, how you celebrate Ramadan or … why is that important to me?

As suggested in the previous chapter, the work here links the religious to personal stories. This, she says, is a kind of preventative work related not only to extremism but more broadly to prejudices and racism as well. As in Anne's work, the emphasis is on people telling their personal story about religion. The last sentence is particularly important in relation to the theoretical work undertaken in this chapter in its mention of Ramadan and 'why that is important to me'. It suggests that although one may accept and engage in traditions such as celebrating Ramadan, the reasons for doing so are personal.

Linda's views on religion qua personal project are further noticeable in the following quotation, where she describes the main rationale of the project:

> At the outset, even though it was me and an imam that started it and schools often said, 'oh, can't an imam and a priest and a rabbi come', we realised that it is not good if merely religious representatives go out. Because that would send the signal that religion is something authoritarian. That there are answers and so on. But we have understood and think it is better to really work with, that young people have their own story. To get a story from a Muslim, a Christian, a Jew, how incredibly different it is, and it becomes pretty obvious when you listen to young people's stories towards religion, or nonreligion, whether you're a humanist or an atheist or whatever you want to call yourself. Or something else. But everybody has a relation to religion, so we try to work with that. That […] everybody has the right to investigate this and that in itself can be a big thing.

A personal story here functions as a way to signal that religion is not authoritarian, that it is not about rules, traditions or religious authorities. Linda further elaborates this view in the following quotation, still describing her work:

> Both for young people but also for adults, to see that there is no … well, this is not Islam, this is Mohammed who speaks from what he knows. And even if an imam speaks, then it would be from what this imam knows and his perspective and how he has grown up. But it becomes very clear. So, we work with strengthening young people to tell their own story and stand up for: well, yes, I don't know everything but this is what it looks like for me, and I think this is important and we do this in my family. And that has a point in itself. So that there is not this rigid …

In the quotation above, even the Prophet is assumed to have no more authority than any other human; he is regarded as merely a historical figure speaking from his personal point of view (and so, according to my interpretation of Linda's words, not speaking the words of God). To avoid giving anything like an authoritarian aura to the project, the organisers decided that the visits in classes should be led by young religious individuals, not by an imam or minister.

The most straightforward formulation of the project's rationale to inspire young people to find their own way in religion is found in the next quotation:

> That the individual has a responsibility for one's religion. That the individual is authorised, that I have the right to call myself a Muslim if I wear a veil, if I don't wear a veil, if I stand on my hands or if I eat ice-cream. The most important message we have is that what it means to be a Muslim is not decided by an imam.

Religion (like democracy in the previous chapter) is here linked to personal responsibility and personal choice, with the individual seen as able and allowed to work out their own religion. Personalised religion, in all of the quotations above, is contrasted to rules and authority. Or to put it differently; personal religion becomes meaningful only in relation to what it is not, through dichotomisation: meaning is construed by contrasting it to authority and rules.

What is illustrated in the above analysis of practical work to prevent prejudice, polarisation, racism, oppression and extremism is that religion tends to be formulated as a matter of personal preference, as choice. Let me now extrapolate and draw some conclusions from the material presented here. It is suggested that this personalised view of religion means that certain aspects of a religion are chosen voluntarily, whereas others are rejected. This also means that all aspects of religion are carefully contemplated by the individual believer, giving it, as it were, a personal touch. Or, to put differently, in identifying freedom, practitioners tend to regard *freedom as equal to a free choice*. They regard the ability to freely choose some aspects and reject others as freedom par excellence. This may seem like an open approach to religion, but there is also a risk that by endorsing a certain understanding of religion and freedom, practitioners adopt their own yardstick in their dealings with other religions. The identification of religion with freedom of choice is a specifically modern/Western conception, and practitioners operating with such a conceptualisation[349] may become triumphalist, seeing other forms of religion as fundamentally unfree. The remainder

[349] Linda notes in the interview that this view of religion is Protestant/Western. Although I agree with her in that regard, I would suggest that this view of religion is linked to a more general and hegemonic view of religion in secular societies. I discussed this in the previous chapter in relation to Charles Taylor. Let me quote him again: 'There are no more naïve theists, just as there are no naïve atheists' (Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Massachusetts/London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 30).

of this chapter is devoted to genealogical analysis to denaturalise the assumptions and preconceptions identified here.

The Omnipotent God: Theological Roots of Free Choice

The above analysis suggests that practitioners emphasise and work with a vision of religion that is closely or intrinsically linked to freedom and free choice. Religion in one interviewee's account is anti-authoritarian: religion is related to the subject's preference and has a personal touch. This view of religion needs to problematised, for if it is extrapolated into social work more generally, there is a risk that practitioners will come to regard certain practices as coerced or unfree, and thus become engaged in a process of trying to liberate people from them. To link back to the discussion in the previous chapter, operating with this view of religion may lead to blind spots where practitioners fail to identify agency in some practices, seeing these instead as characterised by unfreedom. This raises the risk that social work becomes confrontational, similar to what we saw in chapter 3. The alternative view of freedom elaborated in this chapter allows us to identify agency also in religious practices not characterised by freedom of choice. From the standpoint of religion as a lifeworld in which meaning precedes individual choice, agency otherwise invisible to practitioners could well be mobilised and cultivated. If religion is to be taken seriously by social work, I thus believe it necessary to work out an alternative to freedom of choice.

It could be argued that freedom of choice does not really capture the essence of freedom. By providing a brief glimpse of its genealogy, this section elucidates the specific ideas immanent in freedom of choice. Placing a specific understanding of freedom in a historical context also allows me to theorise on freedom beyond the preconceptions identified above. Following Foucault, with very broad strokes, the whole question of whether we are determined by structures or are free makes sense only from a very particular perspective.[350] The purpose of this section is to elaborate on such a perspective. By beginning with an examination of what is usually termed the controversy surrounding the *problem of universals*, I try to provide an account of the theological origins of freedom of choice. A theological discussion on the nature of God launched a modern idea of freedom as unrestrained will. Taking this argument further suggests that modernity itself is a theological insider job,[351] launched through

[350] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Tavistock/Routledge, 2002).
[351] A phrasing borrowed from Sigurdson, see Ola Sigurdson, *Det postsekulära tillståndet: Religion, modernitet, politik* (Göteborg: Glänta Produktion, 2009), 130.

a rejection of teleology.[352] On this note, David Bentley Hart writes that modernity 'understands itself as the history of freedom' and 'the story of liberation, the story of the ascent of the individual out of the shadows of hierarchy and subsidiary identity into the light of full recognition, dignity, and autonomy'.[353] It is exactly this forceful rhetorical gesture by which the will is depicted as having a natural inclination to liberate itself that is critically examined here. A critical examination can provide us with the insight that an unrestrained will is neither timeless nor the most accurate description of freedom.

I begin by describing the nominalist rejection of the theology elaborated by Thomas Aquinas that was central to medieval church doctrine. In order to show what was so novel about nominalism, let me thus first say something about what preceded this prioritisation of the will. Whereas freedom was significant even in Greek antiquity, the Greeks lacked a concept of the will.[354] Christian theologies, by contrast, have always actualised a concern with will and responsibility. The Thomist and/or Augustinian solution to the problem of guilt and responsibility was through *reason*. For Thomas Aquinas, divine freedom and human freedom become one, because in his view human will is coordinated with the divine through reason (*ratio*). Diversion from the divine will (i.e. sin) was an expression of irrationality. Creator and creatures were separated by an unbridgeable gulf, a radical difference, which meant that language is 'developed by creatures to refer to creaturely things' and hence, 'inadequate – and potentially misleading – when applied to God'.[355] Theology, in Aquinas's view, must resist the temptation to formulate God in finite human terms. Theological (human) language can only be applied *analogically* to God. Otherwise, there is always a risk that theology 'domesticates' God and denies God's transcendence. Aquinas puts it like this:

> Thus whatever is said of God and creatures is said according to the relation of God as its principle and cause … Now this mode of community of idea is a mean between pure equivocation and simple univocation. For in analogies the idea is not, as it is in univocal, one and the same, yet it is not totally diverse as in equivocal.[356]

[352] John Milbank and Adrian Pabst, *The Politics of Virtue: Post-liberalism and the Human Future* (London/New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016); Alisdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).
[353] David Bentley Hart, *The Hidden and the Manifest: Essays in Theology and Metaphysics* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2017), 312.
[354] Michael Allen Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 139–144.
[355] Gavin Hyman, *A Short History of Atheism* (London/New York: I. B. Tauris, 2010), 50.
[356] Aquinas cited in Thomas Pfau, *Minding the Modern: Human Agency, Intellectual Traditions and Responsible Knowledge* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), 151.

One could say that Aquinas attempts to rescue theology both from the hubris of pure univocation as well as from pure equivocation, which would render any theology meaningless.

Nominalist theologians polemicised against the restrictions Aquinas imposed on theology. One of the more prominent challengers was John Duns Scotus, who advocated a metaphysics that takes *Being* rather than God (or Reason) as the primary intellectual object. As Scotus himself puts it: '"being" has a primacy of commonness in regard to the primary intelligibles, that is, to the quidditative concepts of the genera, species, individuals, and all their essential parts, and to the Uncreated Being.'[357] In the most abstracted sense, regardless of the vast differences between God and creatures, both Creator and creatures can be said to *exist*. This philosophical/theological move is often referred to as *univocity of being*. According to scholars like John Milbank, the doctrine of univocity directly contravened Aquinas's doctrine of analogy. [358, 359] By opposing the view of language as fundamentally incomplete, Scotus's doctrine of univocity liberated theology from the shackles of apophatic theology. The argument in Scotus' plea for univocity is that language, while grounded in empirical (finite) reality, must still have something to say about God or else theology is totally meaningless.

Scotus's main objective was to bridge the gulf between a transcendent God and finite human understanding by making 'being' the primary objective of metaphysics. The implications of this primacy of being, as read by Milbank, is that existence has similar meaning regardless of whether it is finite or infinite. Milbank clarifies by stating that in Scotism, the term 'exists' receives the same (logical and even metaphysical) connotations in the phrasing 'God exists' as in the sentence 'this woman exists'.[360] The implication according to Milbank, and to Amos Funkenstein before him who suggested that abstract concepts such as Being and Will have the

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[357] John Duns Scotus, 'Concerning Metaphysics,' in *Philosophical Writings: A Selection*, trans. Allan Wolter (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 4.

[358] John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006); John Milbank, *Beyond Secular Order: The Representation of Being and the Representation of People* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2013).

[359] Daniel P. Horan has directed immense critique against Radical Orthodoxy, as the theological movement that Milbank's work has inspired and of which he is part. Radical Orthodoxy can be said to formulate its arguments from the claim that the modern world did not begin with Descartes and Kant, but with John Duns Scotus. Radical Orthodoxy wants to refute a modern outlook and is thus directly anti-Scotist. According to Horan, they treat Scotus as nothing more than a non-Thomist by developing a Scotus story in which Thomas is the hero and Scotus in the villain. Horan's objection to this story is that Milbank is selective in his sources when analysing Scotus and presents only a fragmentary picture of him. Moreover, he confuses logics with metaphysics in his reading of Scotus. According to Horan, univocity is principally a logical concept, not a metaphysical one. This leads Milbank to overemphasise the implications of Scotus' doctrine of univocity for modernity. Horan further believes that Milbank and other scholars in Radical Orthodoxy tend to neglect the fact that Scotus tried to rescue an analogical outlook, not provide full-blown univocity. For a more detailed discussion, see Daniel P. Horan, *Postmodernity and Univocity: A Critical Account of Radical Orthodoxy and John Duns Scotus* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014).

[360] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 305.

same meaning within a doctrine of univocity,[361] is that univocity fundamentally leads to a *domestication* of God. God becomes a thing amongst any others.

By contrast, Catherine Pickstock, a colleague of Milbank's, suggests that '[u]nivocity appears to encourage dualities without mediation: God is unknowably and equivocally remote'.[362] To Pickstock, the implication is not that the gap which separates God and creation disappears, but the exact opposite; God becomes even more remote from creation than in Aquinas' doctrine of analogy. God ceases to permeate creation; God becomes a remote first source. Ironically, it is exactly this gulf that Scotus aspired to bridge, albeit counterproductively according to Pickstock. The implication of Scotist univocity is that knowledge is divorced from any project of ascending 'towards a higher contemplation and practice of goodness',[363] towards God, as was the case for Aquinas. For Aquinas, to become 'better' also implied achieving greater theoretical knowledge, but for Scotus and his followers, this is no longer true.[364] Knowledge becomes 'indifferent' knowing, a move that paved the way for or anticipated Cartesian freedom and indifferent will.[365]

Already here, at least as read by Milbank, we can see that the nominalist doctrine of univocity and the critique of apophatic theology holds the seed of a slightly new understanding of freedom by which divine freedom could be grafted onto humanity. Through univocity, God's freedom suddenly becomes applicable also to humans who are seen as free in the same sense as God, albeit God is infinitely freer. This new emphasis on freedom as 'indifferent knowing' is even more salient in another important figure, the Franciscan friar William of Ockham. Ockham can be said to further radicalise the Scotist domestication of God. If univocity obliterated God's transcendence through domestication or reification, then Ockham's main ambition is to restore an idea of divine transcendence. He does so by appealing to a specific feature of God, namely, God's omnipotence. It was not that omnipotence was unheard of in the heydays of Thomism. What we see is a shift in emphasis, from God's *potentia ordinata* to God's *potentia absoluta*. This shift meant that for Ockham, what is good is good simply because God wills it so. Existence itself is solely a gratuitous gesture.

The emphasis on divine omnipotence implied that the Ockhamist God is an *unrestrained* God, liberated from an overarching *telos*. This concept demands some clarification. The Thomist view is grounded in ancient Greek metaphysics by which

[361] Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century* (Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1986), 26.
[362] Pickstock quoted in Horan, *Postmodernity and Univocity*, 42.
[363] Milbank, *Beyond Secular Order*, 29.
[364] Ibid.
[365] Milbank, *Beyond Secular Order*, 30.

we approach nature not in singularity but in its essential *forms*: 'the will responds to the form, rather than the material particularity of the thing; for the latter is but a vessel for the meaning or value that the intellect apprehends and that the will (as *electio* or *actus*) realizes.'[366] As Thomas Pfau points out, this emphasis on forms had the effect of binding God to his former creations. For instance in Genesis, where it is stated that God realises that the creation was good, it follows that it cannot reasonably be supposed that God would want to remake creation.[367] It is exactly this binding power that forms the basis of Ockham's scepticism towards universals.

A modern concern with unrestrained freedom emerges within this theological controversy and the new emphasis on divine omnipotence. Ockham's omnipotent God could, whenever he wished, simply undo everything and turn good into bad.[368] Although univocity had obliterated divine transcendence, Ockham is able to restore it by appealing to this radical freedom, a feature exclusive to God. However, transcendence here takes on a somewhat new form. According to Gillespie, transcendence is transformed from quality to quantity; in Thomism, God is radically different from creation, but in nominalism, the goodness of God is the same as the goodness of creation, although to a higher degree. Ockham thus further decreases the qualitative distance between God and creation that began with Scotus.

It was within a nominalist critique of universals, which were said to impede divine omnipotence by binding God to God's creation, that a concept of radical freedom emerged, although first applicable only to God. By emphasising absolute divine will, the ordered cosmos of Thomism gave way for a cosmos ruled by a potentially whimsical and despotic divine ruler.[369] Unlike Scotus, who was read principally in esoteric theological circles, Ockham and his follower's ideas concerning unrestrained freedom became quite popular and came to be commonplace at the universities.[370] Absolute freedom thus became the yardstick of all human endeavours (e.g. through the idea of private property and unrestrained freedom in market relations[371]). In other words, the nominalists gave birth to a new form of *absolute freedom* – a freedom stripped of its teleological shackles. The rejection of universals opened up a path towards a purely negative and nihilistic freedom: 'a liberty whose intentional horizon has been purged

[366] Pfau, *Minding the Modern*, 146.
[367] Pfau, *Minding the Modern*, 149.
[368] Although, in all fairness, Ockham did not really believe that God would do that; see Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity,* 24.
[369] Michael Allen Gillespie, *Nihilism Before Nietzsche* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).
[370] Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge/London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012), 38.
[371] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*.

of all goods – all prior objects – and one that thus lies open before the indeterminate'.[372]

As a critical tool, genealogy here provides us with the insight that free choice, as defined in modernity, is not the sheer accomplishment of a liberating will. Freedom of choice and the omnipotence of humanity is instituted to solve particular issues, for example, the problems of theological language and its ability to say something about the divine. By embracing 'the notion of humanism as the perennial destiny of the West and of human autonomous freedom as always gestating in the womb of "Judeo-Christianity"', as Milbank writes,[373] there is a risk that we fail to see how freedom of choice is instituted through controversy, that it could have been otherwise and that it makes sense only from a specific standpoint. If history has taught us anything, it is that what may seem like a timeless concept is in fact a series of choices, all of them the object of critique and controversy. What we have here is a *black box* of freedom, as Bruno Latour would have it, by which all controversy becomes invisible from a retroactive standpoint.[374] Social work could benefit significantly from opening this black box, as it allows us to avoid too narrow an understanding of freedom, and thus also of religion.

Critical Comment on Freedom from Luther and Erasmus

In further opening this black box of freedom and providing practitioners with a critical tool to understand the complex issue of freedom, I turn now towards another important controversy concerning freedom, namely that between Martin Luther and Erasmus of Rotterdam. This controversy is revisited with the purpose of clarifying and elucidating the contested nature of the modern concept of freedom. The debate between Luther and Erasmus was an important step towards a modern concept of freedom,[375] which is why it deserves a place in this investigation. An investigation of this debate reveals that a very precise formulation of the concept of the will is favoured in discussing freedom of choice, the one formulated by Erasmus and rejected by Luther. There is an eloquent formulation by Luther in his polemics with Erasmus that puts a finger on what freedom of choice really means: it presupposes a will that wills nothing in particular.[376] This, in my view, is freedom of choice par excellence.

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[372] Bentley Hart, *The Hidden and the Manifest*, 314.
[373] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 9.
[374] See Bruno Latour, *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers Through Society* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1987).
[375] Cf. Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity*, chapters 4 & 5.
[376] Martin Luther, *On Bondage of the Will* (England: Printed by T. Bensley for W. Simpkin and R. Marshall and sold by J. Eedes, 1823), section 49.

Before elaborating on the differences between Luther and Erasmus, it could be worth commenting briefly on their resemblances. Both Luther and Erasmus saw problems with corruption in the church, both of them wanted to reform the church and believed that such a reformation required a return to Scripture in its originality,[377] here construed as allegiance to the humanist movement of returning to original sources.[378] Erasmus and Luther were also in agreement on the Christian doctrine of the fall, which had the effect of damaging the human ability to separate right from wrong. Humanity, for both of them, is a *curtailed* humanity. This forms the basis of a relationship between God and human beings where God's grace is essential to freedom, although a freedom that is drastically impaired.

Within this agreement, however, Erasmus's position clearly deviates from Luther's. Luther had previously stated that after the fall, free will exists only name, and 'as long as it does what it is able to do, it commits a mortal sin'.[379] Erasmus agrees with Luther that freedom after the fall is principally a matter of assent to and cooperation with divine grace.[380] However, in his argument against Luther in his *Discourse on Free Will* [*De libero arbitrio diatribe sive collatio*] from 1524, Erasmus proclaims that the free will is the 'power of the human will whereby man can apply to or turn away from that which leads unto eternal salvation'.[381] He suggests that although drastically impaired, our power of judgement is not extinguished altogether.[382] If humanity has no sense of any moral compass at all, how can Christian imperatives of redemption be anything but meaningless, Erasmus asks. A doctrine of redemption requires a sense of direction and '[a]ll these exhortations would lose their meaning if really necessity were to determine good and evil acts'.[383] Sin 'ceases to be sin if it is not voluntary'.[384] This does not imply that humanity for Erasmus has an inherited moral capability separate from faith, for it is through God's grace that liberty emerges. Grace acts *through* will whereby 'God's mercy precedes our will, accompanies it, and gives it fruitfulness'.[385]

In Luther's response, *On the Bondage of the Will* [*De Servo Arbitrio*] from 1525, he distinguishes between *voluntas*, the will, and *liberum arbitrium*, freedom of

[377] Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity*, 135.
[378] Ola Sigurdson, *Antiken till renässansen. Vol. 1, Gudomliga komedier: Humor, subjektivitet, transcendens* (Göteborg: Glänta Produktion, 2021), Chapter 6; Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity*, 135–139.
[379] Luther quoted in Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity*, 144.
[380] Sigurdson, Gudomliga komedier, 358.
[381] Desiderius Erasmus, 'The Free Will,' in *Discourse on Free Will: Desiderius Erasmus and Martin Luther*, ed. Ernst F. Winter (London/New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 26.
[382] Erasmus, 'The Free Will,' 30.
[383] Erasmus, 'The Free Will,' 39.
[384] Erasmus, 'The Free Will,' 33
[385] Erasmus, The Free Will,' 56.

choice.[386] *Liberum arbitrium* is the ability to turn towards or away from salvation, but the will, *voluntas*, on the other hand, is already engaged. This distinction opens up into a critique of Erasmus. Luther identifies in Erasmus's thought an abstract and neutral medium in which the will seems to reside:

> in the will of man there is a certain willing, which cannot indeed will good without grace, but which, nevertheless, being without grace, does not immediately will nothing but evil, but is a sort of *mere abstracted willing*, vertible, upwards unto good by grace, and downwards unto evil by sin.[387]

Will here exists independently of grace, even prior to grace.

Luther repudiates the idea of a neutral medium with the argument that the will *always* has a direction. For Luther, there is no will that wills nothing: 'desire and endeavour [cannot] be a mere willing; for desire must strive and attempt something (as good, perhaps) and cannot go forth into nothing, nor be absolutely inactive'.[388] Luther even charges Erasmus with abandoning his own position of a curtailed humanity:

> Whereas the matter rather stands as Christ saith, 'He that is not with me is against me.' He does not say, He that is not with me is yet not *against me*, but *in the medium*. For if God be in us, Satan is from us, and it is present with us to will nothing but good. But if God be not in us, Satan is in us, and it is present with us to will evil only. Neither God nor Satan admit of a *mere abstracted willing* in us; but, as you yourself rightly said, when our liberty is lost we are compelled to serve sin.[389]

An abstract subject requires a break with the theology of original sin because it presupposes that the will can liberate itself from grace and inherited sinfulness. In Luther's reading, the Christian notion of an impaired humanity collapses in Erasmus's theology, which instead prioritises an abstract will, one that is no longer bound to sinfulness. Luther, to the contrary, says that the will either wills good or it wills evil. By doing so, the will always has a direction.

The philosophical implications of this controversy are far-reaching. What can be extrapolated from this debate on freedom of choice is that it rests on a very precise philosophical formulation of the subject. For Erasmus, if freedom is to mean anything at all, it must predate faith or sin. It is the bare-naked choice that enables faith, that which makes faith meaningful. In Luther, by contrast, faith and faith alone (*Sola Fides*) is what enables human freedom. That is, for Luther, freedom is not freedom to

[386] Sigurdson, *Gudomliga komedier*. 349–362.
[387] Luther, *On Bondage of the Will*, section 49.
[388] Ibid.
[389] Ibid.

choose faith, but to *already be chosen*. Ruda writes about Luther: 'God works in us even against our will, which is why true faith never begins with free choice but with a forced reorientation of one's life'.[390] For Ruda, Luther is ultimately a fatalist (and Ruda admires him in this regard). Sigurdson further explains that salvation for Luther is not grounded in accomplishments but in faith by which humanity is free to act: 'Through faith, which is not the individual's own accomplishment but a gift from God, she becomes free both from circumstantial external forces to define who she is, and to serve one's neighbour without regard to whether these acts contribute to her own identity'.[391] This Lutheran form of freedom – freedom as *gift* – is radically different from Erasmus' *liberium arbitrium*. For the former, freedom as gift is instituted in us even 'against' our will, so to speak.

However, and this is the main argument here, this is still a form of freedom. Thus, in the controversy on freedom a peculiar form of freedom emerges that cannot be captured by the usual dichotomy of either freedom or determinism. Following this view on freedom, Ruda (influenced by Luther and a few other 'fatalists' such as Descartes, Hegel and Freud) emphatically rejects freedom of choice, seeing it as a vulgar form of freedom turned into a 'personal capacity', into something that can be possessed and used as a resource or 'property'.[392] In this rejection, Ruda opens up a radically different form of freedom, one that is actualised only in the form of fatalism. There is potential for social work in Luther's view on freedom as a gift grounded not on free choice but in a forced reorientation.

Now that freedom of choice has been critically examined and scrutinised, it is time to more systematically provide alternatives that can better cater to the needs of social workers in their dealings with a plethora of religious traditions, not all of them conceivable through the lenses of freedom of choice.

Habit and Prevenient Grace in Ravaisson

The above inquiry into two controversies concerning freedom has shown that freedom is a controversial and difficult subject, a concept that lacks any final meaning. If we follow the argument made in this dissertation – that religion is a horizon of meaning that precedes individual choice and preference – then freedom in the form of unrestrained will becomes problematic and unsatisfactory indeed. In order to minimise the

[390] Frank Ruda, *Abolishing Freedom: A Plea for a Contemporary Use of Fatalism* (Lincoln/London: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), 16.
[391] Sigurdson, *Det postsekulära tillståndet*, 155, my translation.
[392] Ruda, *Abolishing Freedom*, 2.

possibility that social workers try to instil freedom in subjects who do not regard themselves as coerced, it is imperative to work out a different and better understanding of freedom. This section provides a theoretical example of how freedom can emerge through compliance and receptivity, an example that can be of use when theorising on religion in social work. I accordingly turn our attention towards the French philosopher and spiritualist Félix Ravaisson, whose philosophy offers a theoretical argument for a view of religion as grounded in passivity and receptivity.

'Grace' in Ravaisson's view means receptivity, and yet it does not mean being inactive or unfree. In his philosophy of habit, freedom emerges in the form of spontaneous and smooth activity, but this activity is only possible through (sometimes painstaking) habituation. He proposes the idea that becoming fully immersed in religious rituals and practices, as defined by authoritative sources such as tradition, Scripture, or perhaps even statements from religious leaders, does not of necessity negate freedom. Instead, another form of freedom emerges in turning painstaking effort into frictionless activity. In other words, we are free when allowing ourselves to be fully immersed in liturgies, which become part of our disposition that can then be used freely, creatively, voluntarily. This vision of freedom as the ability to act in accordance with one's disposition harmonises well with the overall argument in this dissertation of religion as lifeworld. Rather than speaking of freedom as autonomy, it is more accurate to speak of agency in the form of the ability to act within the horizon of an already meaningful world.

To allow readers to grasp what was so innovative about Ravaisson's philosophy, let me first say something briefly about habit as it has been discussed philosophically. Etymologically, the word 'habit' derives from the Latin word *habitus* and the Greek word *hexis*, deriving from the verb 'to have' or 'to hold' (*habere*, *ekhein*).[393] Contemporary philosophy, however, is no longer fascinated by habit and the concept has been 'neglected, along with much else about our bodily attunement to a real world of other living beings and natural forces, with the postmodern fascination with representation and its linguistic and signifying effects'.[394] This degradation of habit is not unique to postmodernism, however, for it is also true of modernism more generally.

The German philosopher Immanuel Kant, for example, held a particularly critical view of habit. He identified only the *irrational* elements in habit, and in his attempt to work out a space for freedom beyond the laws of necessity, he places habits in the

[393] Clare Carlisle and Mark Sinclair, 'Editor's Introduction,' in *Félix Ravaisson, Of Habit*, trans. Clare Carlisle and Mark Sinclair (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2008), 5.
[394] Elizabeth Grosz, 'Habit Today: Ravaisson, Bergson, Deleuze and us,' *Body & Society* 19, no. 2–3 (2013): 217, https://doi.org/10.1177/1357034X12472544.

realm of necessity. Habits, for Kant, are nothing but mechanical and involuntary actions. They evade reflection and are nothing more than mindless repetition, automatic responses to external stimuli. That is why Kant excludes habit from the ethical: 'habit is "a physical inner necessitation to continue behaving in the same way we have behaved thus far", which as such "deprives even good actions of their moral value"'.[395] An act is grounded in free will, says Kant, and thus never induced by fear, external coercion or routine, or it ceases to be a moral act (in this respect, Kantian ethics is highly demanding[396]). As noted by Catherine Malabou, the Kantian or Cartesian tradition thus

> sees in habit the epitome of inauthenticity, a simulacrum of being, an imitation of virtue. Pure mechanism, routine process, devitalization of sense, habit is the disease of repetition that threatens the freshness of thought and stifles the voice, repeatable but never stale, of the categorical imperative.[397]

In pre-modern philosophy, habit instead played an immense role as the route to freedom. For Aristotle, moral virtue does not arise naturally in us but must be cultivated through habit.[398] Habituation is the way our morality is internalised and comes to permeate the body and make up part of our inclinations and tendencies to choose.[399] Alluding to the investigation in the previous chapter, it can be further suggested with Aristotle that inner inclinations are not necessarily authentic, if by authentic we also mean spontaneous. A moral disposition is shaped by continuously doing what is right, acts which finally become part of our tendencies. Good acts become smooth, effortless, even joyful.[400]

However, as Slavoj Žižek remarks, '[i]n the shift from Aristotle to Kant, to modernity with its subject as pure autonomy, the status of the habit changes from organic inner rule to something mechanical, the opposite of human freedom: freedom can never become habit(ual); if it becomes a habit, it is no longer true freedom'.[401, 402]

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[395] Kant quoted in Clare Carlisle, *On Habit: Thinking in Action* (London/New York: Routledge, 2014), 95.
[396] For a more detailed description of the radicality of Kant's ethical demands, see Alenka Zupančič, *Ethics of the Real: Kant, Lacan* (London/New York: Verso, 2000).
[397] Catherine Malabou, 'Addiction and Grace: Preface to Félix Ravaisson's *Of Habit,'* in Félix Ravaisson *Of Habit*, trans. by Clare Carlisle and Mark Sinclair (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2008), vii.
[398] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. C. D. D. Reeve (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2014), 21
[399] Carlisle, *On Habit*, 99.
[400] See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 23–25.
[401] Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, 340–341.
[402] It should be clarified that Žižek tends to be reluctant to adhere to Aristotle. Following Lacan in his *Seminar XII:The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, Žižek is sceptical of the Aristotelian notion of a succesful end that, in Žižek's view, is unthinkable in a modern world. Žižek's political philosophy is at its core critical of any political attempts to ultimately decide on the Good. For Žižek, a genuinely political act is oriented towards the unknown, the non-symbolised. However, in this passage, he obviously finds support in Aristotle and his understanding of habit. On this matter, however, Žižek draws partly on Malabou, who is a reader of Hegel, as is Žižek. In Malabou's view, Hegel develops the idea of nature as second nature, first addressed by

Ravaisson's response to this modern inability to identify freedom as an aspect of determinism and habituation plants the seed of the vision developed in this dissertation. In his analysis of habit, Ravaisson forcefully develops a definition of freedom that contains dependency and unreflective behaviour as its fundament. He does so by integrating a Stoic ideal of effort with an Augustinian ideal of receptivity and placing emphasis on 'intuition, deepest feeling and intimate experience'.[403] This refusal to place freedom outside the realm of determinism, as Kant does, is why Ravaisson holds potential for my theorisation, offering as he does a way out of dichotomisations. Put differently, in Ravaisson there is an argument against a tendency to reject forms of submission (e.g. following scripture, conducting rituals or generally, forms of receptivity) too hastily as obstacles to freedom. Ravaisson develops this argument in his short essay *De l'habitude* from 1838, in which he proposes that habit is not 'merely a state, but a disposition, a virtue'.[404] By separating habit from mere repetition, and stating that a habit is not formed by throwing a body at the same direction and speed a hundred times,[405] Ravaisson introduces the notion of change within the concept of habit.[406]

Habits, on this view, are not unreflective but are an immediate link between the realm of necessity and the realm of freedom. He presupposes a *unity,* a kind of consciousness or subjectivity (although one needs to be careful here since for Ravaisson habits exist everywhere in nature, even in plants – e.g. the habit of plants to turn towards the sun). Nevertheless, by pointing towards the immediacy between necessity and free existence, Ravaisson is explicitly anti-Kantian. Against Kant, Ravaisson asserts that even though life is influenced and shaped by external influences, life still 'endlessly triumphs over them.'[407] The will is not alienated from necessity, but constitutes its most accomplished form. Despite having its origin in the 'mechanical' world, that is, within the realm of necessity, the will is still not limited to the mechanical world: as it develops, it is incorporated into the organism until it 'manifests itself within that mechanical world in the most accomplished form of the freest activity'.[408]

Aristotle. Žižek's critique of the modern view of habit may thus, in such a reading, be grounded in Žižek's Hegelianism rather than in a genuine interest in Aristotle.

[403] Simone Kotva, *Effort and Grace: On the Spiritual Exercise of Philosophy* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 60.

[404] Félix Ravaisson, *Of Habit*, trans. by Clare Carlisle and Mark Sinclair (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2008), 25.

[405] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 21.

[406] Ibid.

[407] Ravaisson, *Of Habit*, 31.

[408] Ravaisson, *Of Habit* 39.

Ravaisson explains this triumph over nature by what he refers to as the *double law of habit*. Paradoxically, habituation is constituted *both* by dulling mechanisation *and* by creativity: A habit is characterised by the weakening of receptivity by which the imprints lose their intensity, is mechanised, and yet, simultaneously, movement becomes independent of its material base, taking the form of volition.[409] On this reasoning, effort is both passive, receptive, *and* dependent upon the will:

> as effort fades away in movement and as action becomes freer and swifter, the action itself becomes more of a tendency, an inclination that no longer awaits the commandments of the will but rather anticipates them, and which even escapes entirely and irremediably both will and consciousness. This is particularly evident in those movements, initially more or less voluntary, that gradually degenerate into convulsive ones, which we call *tics*.[410]

Let me clarify this rather abstract argument with an ordinary example: Think of a piano player who, after assiduous training, has to focus on their fingers less and less. The fingers finally move by themselves over the piano, as the pianist becomes better. Yet, this does not mean that playing the piano is a mindless ritual. The experienced player, who focuses less and less on the fingers, can instead direct his or her attention to the piece being played. The experienced player becomes even more attentive to the particular piece and its many nuances compared to the inexperienced player.[411]

Ravaisson is by no means oblivious to the fact that habits can become dulling and mechanised, as emphasised by Kant. But for Ravaisson, effort entails *both* passivity and action, with the former having an external cause whereas the latter originates in the being itself.[412] Ravaisson himself explains this in terms of the difference between a connoisseur and an addict: a wine connoisseur develops a sensitive palate, whereas the addict becomes an excessive and indiscriminate drinker; the addict's drinking is almost like a tic.[413]

Ravaisson's treatise *Of Habit* directly polemicises against freedom of choice and freedom qua autonomy. In the broadest interpretation, autonomy and freedom of choice stand in contrast to any form of receptivity. But as Ravaisson shows, receptivity is not the antithesis of freedom. Intelligence and habit formation are two sides of the same coin by which freedom is not negated by habit, it is made flesh, it 'pervades

[409] Ravaisson, *Of Habit*, 37.
[410] Ravaisson, *Of Habit*, 51.
[411] Example taken from Simon Oliver, Public lecture, 'Consciousness, Intention and Final Causation,' University of Gothenburg, May 10, 2019.
[412] Ravaisson, *Of Habit*, 43–47.
[413] Ravaisson, *Of Habit*, 49.

the body, and increasingly animates it'.[414] This aspect of Ravaisson's thought can be even better elucidated through his view on grace. In the following excerpt, Ravaisson clarifies the links between theology and his philosophy of nature:

> Nature lies wholly in desire, and desire, in turn, lies in the good that attracts it. In this way the profound words of a profound theologian might be confirmed: 'Nature is prevenient grace'. It is God within us, God hidden solely by being so far within us in this intimate source of ourselves, to whose depths we do not descend.[415]

In Ravaisson's concept of grace, freedom does not precede choice as it does for liberal philosophers. All actions are already motivated and meaningful, even beyond the particular individual choice. The good is present in us already, Ravaisson says, as a motif, albeit one that 'does not differ from the soul itself'.[416] Ravaisson is thus able to downplay the individual and reflective aspects of freedom treasured by liberal philosophers and instead emphasise latent and pre-reflective forms of freedom. Grace, on this account, does not abolish but perfects effort.[417]As Ravaisson says, grace is not reflectively willed, 'yet I am not inactive, for I am impelled by love'.[418]

To conclude, Ravaisson is able to provide an understanding of freedom other than freedom as unimpeded choice. Freedom, in Ravaisson's view, is the ability to act, but this ability is formed, shaped in a setting, often through careful and even painstaking effort. Freedom is smooth activity, the ability to use habituated skills for specific purposes. In practical terms, this means that to act in accordance with a norm, a religious teaching or the like is not necessarily giving up one's freedom. It may very well be construed as a form of agency. This nuanced understanding of freedom is better able to identify agency in religious acts even in cases when these diverge from the (modern) ideal of idiosyncrasy and non-engaged will. For Ravaisson, as for Luther, the will always has a direction and is shaped in a setting. By operating with a notion of freedom qua agency emerging from the horizon of a meaningful world, the risk that practitioners delegitimise certain forms of religious practice, seeing them as either insincere or as extreme simply because they fail to conform to an ideal of an idiosyncratic will, is starkly minimised. This, I believe, is the major benefit of having a different understanding of freedom.

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[414] Clare Carlisle, 'Between Freedom and Necessity: Félix Ravaisson on Habit and the Moral Life,' *Inquiry (Oslo, Norway)* 53, no. 2 (2010): 133, https://doi.org/10.1080/00201741003612146.
[415] Ravaisson, *Of Habit*, 71.
[416] Ravaisson cited in Kotva, *Effort and Grace*, 72; See also, Félix Ravaisson, 'Contemporary Philosophy,' in *Félix Ravaisson: Selected Essays*, ed. Mark Sinclair (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 80.
[417] Kotva, *Effort and Grace*, 72.
[418] Kotva, *Effort and Grace*, 73.

Freedom in Rule-Following

I shall now investigate two other theoretical examples of how freedom can be conceived of in contrast to idiosyncrasy. To work out a notion of freedom that precedes or goes beyond individual reflective choice, I examine first Catherine Malabou (an important follower and interpreter of Ravaisson) and then Paolo Virno. In their work, one can identify a relation between rules and freedom that can allow me to even further work out a concept of freedom that harmonises with the overall argument in this dissertation that religion is situated in a practical setting that is always already meaningful. Most importantly, what Virno and Malabou are able to show is how the most rigid rule-following and habituation also entail a moment of potential disruption and transformation. The implication of this argument is that if religion is contextual, if it is formed in a specific setting, that is, interpreted and reinterpreted by a specific community, then the narratives, teachings and even rules of this religion are also transformable. Thus that what may seem like slavish rule-following may indeed include transformable elements.

Malabou's work is influenced by neuroscience and particularly by what is termed neuronal plasticity, that is, the way in which our brains modify and change over the course of a lifespan. However, influenced by Aristotle, Hegel and Ravaisson, she assigns a certain philosophical weight to this neuronal plasticity. It is particularly her Hegelian reading of neuroscience that interests me here, for it holds a seed for a paradoxical understanding of what it means to allow oneself to be changed, to be receptive. But first, something needs to be said about her approach to the brain. She suggests that although the brain's plasticity is clearly shown in modern neuroscience, we have yet to grasp the implications of these insights.

Brain plasticity refers to the way the brain continues to evolve and change throughout the lifespan of an individual, while never being undetermined or polymorphous. There are, in Malabou's view, three forms of plasticity: developmental plasticity (the ability of the brain to evolve during childhood development), modulational plasticity (the ability for synapses to modify), and reparative plasticity (the brain's capacity to compensate for damage or loss of function).[419]

The neuronal plasticity described by Malabou operates exactly at the intersection of necessity and freedom that was given so much weight in Ravaisson's philosophy. As Malabou puts it:

> [W]ith plasticity we are dealing with a concept that is not contradictory but graduated, because the very plasticity of its meaning situates it at the extremes of a

[419] Catherine Malabou, *What Should We Do with Our Brain?* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 17–29.

> formal necessity (the irreversible character of formation: determination) and of a remobilization of form (the capacity to form oneself otherwise, to displace, even to nullify determination: freedom).[420]

For Malabou, her philosophical reading of neuroscience holds a seed for emancipation, and her argument is that plasticity may function as a form of critique of capitalism. Although interesting in its own right, this is not what concerns me here. Rather, I find potential for my own argument in the term 'plasticity' as it is developed philosophically.

Much of the philosophical groundwork is laid in Malabou's early book, *The Future of Hegel*, in which she deals specifically with whether Hegel's philosophy has a future. In her rereading of Hegel, she rejects the teleological, sometimes said to be totalitarian, reading of Hegel. Instead, she opts for a Hegel who is open to change.[421] On her reading, the dialectical process is characterised by and links to contrary moments of fixity and dissolution, 'of teleological necessity and surprise'.[422] Plasticity is central to her treatise, said to further be bringing out a dimension of freedom that cannot be captured by the so clearly opposed alternatives of freedom and determinism. For Malabou, plasticity means both 'to be "susceptible to changes of form" or malleable' and 'having the power to bestow form, the power to mould'.[423] Plasticity is neither rigid *nor* polymorphous; 'Things that are plastic preserve their shape, as does the marble in a statue: once given a configuration, it is unable to recover its initial form.'[424] Malabou finds in Hegel a philosophy that deals exactly with this double meaning of plasticity.

In her reading of Hegel, Malabou suggests that plasticity is akin to embodiment as forming a specific relation between the universal and the particular. Plasticity is to 'acquire [the] formative principle from the universal – the concept – while at the same time bestowing a particular form on the universal by *incarnating* it'.[425] Plasticity entails a relation between the universal and the particular as mutually constitutive.[426] Hegel's words 'not only as *Substance*, but equally as *Subject*',[427] a much-debated

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[420] Malabou, *What Should We Do with Our Brain?*, 17.
[421] Malabou is not alone in this regard. Philosophers such as Slavoj Žižek and Frederick Jameson also read Hegel in this way. See Fredric Jameson, *The Hegel Variations: On the Phenomenology of Spirit* (London: Verso, 2010); Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (London/New York: Verso, 2013).
[422] Catherine Malabou, *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectics*, trans. Lisabeth During (London: Verso, 2005), 13.
[423] Malabou, *The Future of Hegel*, 8.
[424] Malabou, *The Future of Hegel*, 9.
[425] Malabou, *The Future of Hegel*, 10–11.
[426] Malabou, *The Future of Hegel*, 11.
[427] George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 10.

phrase in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*,[428] is essential to Malabou's concept of plasticity as I read her: plasticity is the middle between the universal and the particular, the way universal substance becomes subject. For Hegel, the universal substance finds its truth *only* in individuality, in subjectivity.[429] Universality is thus a 'primitive stage' of Spirit, a mere potentiality, actualised through subjectivity. It is in this sense that nature is always 'second nature', or negated nature, 'marked by its own difference from itself'.[430]

According to Malabou, plasticity is utterly dialectical because it contains both the potential to produce or capture form and the potential to annihilate it; the moulding entails an inalienable moment of total annihilation, of a blank slate. The dialectical process of subject-formation – from potentiality to actuality – can be understood through an analysis of habit. Here, Malabou finds a resemblance between Hegel and Ravaisson. Habit can be said to encapsulate the Hegelian paradoxical integration of teleological necessity and rupture. Habit allows subjectivity to escape the immediacy of the soul and, likewise, to escape full-blown particularity: 'Habit has helped man to acquire the "plastic character", making him [sic] at once "universal and individual"'.[431] For Malabou, habit is characterised by a latent potentiality, a certain skill or knowledge 'absorbed' by the subject, but its exact outcome is never given. Difference is thus immanent to this very form of repetition, as is also made clear by the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze, for whom habits bring the past into the present, as it were.[432]

There is a striking similitude between Hegel and Ravaisson here. Malabou's reading of Hegel further clarifies some aspects of how freedom is actualised, refined, through habituation. Again, habits are shaped through repetition in such a way that knowledge or skills are absorbed, becoming latent in the subject, yet this does not, as for Kant, mean mindless repetition. Although a skill or a disposition is internalised, the application of any skill is never determined in advance since it always entails a *potentially destabilising* or rupturing moment. In this way, one could say that creativity is immanent to habit formation; creativity is only possible when skills are internalised, becoming our own and running smoothly, with ease (as Ravaisson says). Žižek puts it eloquently by stating, using the example of language, that 'in order for

[428] See Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, chapter 6; Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London/New York: Verso, 1989), chapter 6.
[429] Malabou, *The Future of Hegel*, 29.
[430] Malabou, *What Should We Do with Our Brain?*, 81.
[431] Malabou, *The Future of Hegel*, 73.
[432] See Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 1994).

us to exercise freedom in using language, we have to get fully accustomed to it, habituated (in)to it, we have to learn to practice it, to apply its rules "blindly", mechanically, as a habit'.[433] This, I think, is how to read Malabou's argument that habit in the form of plasticity turns the body into an instrument of the will.[434] Habit is how the universal subject is incarnated and actualised in the subject, which is the fundament of our freedom. Malabou quotes Alain, who says:

> When freedom comes it is in the sphere of habit … Here the body is no longer a foreign being, reacting belligerently against me; rather it is pervaded by the soul and has become soul's instrument and means.[435]

The take-home message from Malabou, according to my reading, is that difference is immanent in repetition, a point famously made by Deleuze. For Malabou, the developing of a skill or the shaping of a disposition always entail moments of radical undecidability. Malabou's reading of Hegel is related to the turn in Hegel studies that diverts from the teleological and totalitarian features of his philosophy and moves towards an emphasis on difference. Žižek says that absolute knowing in Hegel is not the position where all contradictions are resolved, but on the contrary, the realisation that all positions are threatened by their own negation.[436] Malabou thus represents a similar position with her view on plasticity, particularly noticeable in how plasticity is both to receive and take form and simultaneously to annihilate form. Becoming a subject, or differently, internalising and using skills, is always afflicted with a radical moment of undecidability, it is always potentially disruptive. Disruption is thus built into the very process of internalising skills, norms or behaviours.

An investigation of Paolo Virno's philosophy can further elucidate how rule-following may be an immanent aspect of transformation and change. Virno's main philosophical edifice is founded on an intent to philosophically grasp the condition of post-Fordism. By re-actualising the Spinozan concept of *multitude* by which a One resists becoming a unified mass, subordinate to the state, Virno describes how a new era of capitalism is able to make use of immaterial, cognitive or creative labour.[437] He also re-actualises philosophical investigations into human nature against constructivist approaches that sidestep any such notions, and he often takes as his starting point the precariousness, openness and even dangerousness of human nature.[438]

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[433] Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, 342.
[434] Malabou, *The Future of Hegel*, 38.
[435] Alain cited in Malabou, *The Future of Hegel*, 36.
[436] Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*.
[437] Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*, trans. Isabella Bertoletti, James Cascaito, and Andrea Casson (New York: SemiotextI, 2004).
[438] Paolo Virno, *When the Word Becomes Flesh: Language and Human Nature*, trans. Guiseppina Mecchia (Los Angeles: SemiotextI, 2015).

The investigation here is limited to his essay on jokes, however, as his analysis of jokes reveals something of value when it comes to rule-following and creativity/freedom. In this essay, Virno investigates the nature of creativity which, although enabled through the linguistic potential in the human animal, is still intermittent and rare.[439] The intermittent character of human creativity has gone rather unnoticed in philosophy, according to Virno, who despite being influenced by Arnold Gehlen, says that Gehlen brushes the problem aside by saying that the overabundance of stimuli and the lack of a controlled environment makes humanity immanently creative; humanity, '"unfounded" as it is, can never be not creative'.[440] Against tautology – humans are creative because they are a linguistic animal, that is, because they are humans – Virno wants to investigate what really constitutes a creative act, and he does this by analysing jokes.

In a joke, a clever or witty remark, Virno identifies an act of radical rupture and a possible transformation of a form of life. The first part of his essay entails a meticulous clarification of the nature of jokes that does not need to be rehearsed here. Briefly, he draws on Freud's book *Jokes and the Relation to the Unconscious*, although he pays no attention to the relation between jokes [*Witz*] and unconscious desires, as does Freud. Virno is empathically non-Freudian. His main approach to jokes, which he believes is also what Freud illustrated, is that a joke is an unexpected application of a rule, one that leads to a kind of suspension of the rule: 'The suspension, or modification, of a rule unveils the paradoxes, and its insoluble problems, normally unnoticed,' he says.[441] By being formulated within the commonness of language, the joke finds its meaning only within a shared and established way of applying a general rule to a particular case, what Aristotle names *endoxa*. It is only against the background of a shared and mutual understanding of how a grammatical or linguistic rule ought to be applied that the joke can take form, or else it will go unnoticed and be unsuccessful. But by applying the rule unexpectedly, the joke refutes and disrupts the very *endoxa* from which it derives, so to speak. It extracts from it 'consequences so bizarre as to cause it to retroact', Virno says.[442] In this way, a joke or an otherwise unexpected application of a norm holds a potential for innovation, for transforming a form of life by linking together otherwise heterogenous and previously unrelated aspects or elements.[443]

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[439] Paolo Virno, *Multitude: Between Innovation and Negation*, trans. Isabella Bertoletti, James Cascaito and Andrea Casson (Los Angeles: SemiotextI, 2008), 69–70.
[440] Virno, *Multitude*, 70.
[441] Virno, *Multitude*, 72.
[442] Virno, *Multitude*, 95.
[443] Virno, *Multitude*, 97.

To make sense of this, Virno draws on the Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein. For Wittgenstein, there is no rule that can explain the application of a rule. If there were, that would lead to infinite regress, a constant search for a superior rule. Instead, there is no direct linkage between the norm and its realisation, there is 'a real and true *incommensurability*', Virno says.[444] What he means is that in a concrete realisation, there is nothing telling us exactly where to go, how to apply it; there are always a multiplicity of ways to realise it. The signpost does not authoritatively point. Wittgenstein is elegant in his formulation:

> This was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule. The answer was: if everything can be made out to accord with the rule, then it can also be made out to conflict with it. And so there would be neither accord nor conflict here.[445]

In Wittgenstein, the semantic and the semiotic are separated by an unbridgeable gulf, a vacuum in which the practitioner, or in Virno, the joke teller, must decide for themselves the appropriate realisation. This gulf is what constitutes the fundamental possibility for transformation.

The implication is, then, that following a rule is not mere mindless repetition. In fact, Virno says, rule-following is inextricably decisionistic, it carries with it the Schmittian 'state of exception', as it were.[446] What he means by this is that in application, there is always an eliminable element of radical undecidability. Although this is not his main purpose, Virno effectively says something interesting about freedom here, according to my reading. Given that for Virno, to apply a rule is to decide or to truncate, which means to cut away or stop an infinite regress, then all rule-following entails a *decision*. On this note, he links rule-following to the topic of freedom by saying that the term 'to truncate' 'is surrounded, who knows why, by an aristocratic aura', portrayed as it is as 'an activity reserved for those who exercise, in solitude, the mythological faculty of free will. Nothing could be more mistaken', Virno says.[447] For Virno, to truncate is 'an opaque biological necessity'[448] for the human animal.

Decision-making is not something reserved only for the sovereign or the liberated bourgeoisie; it is the sheer effect of our precarious nature, our openness to the world, as the philosophical anthropologist Helmuth Plessner (as read by Virno) suggests. To say the same thing, when it comes to the differences between Wittgenstein and

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[444] Virno, *Multitude*, 102.
[445] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958), 81.
[446] Virno, *Multitude*, 107–125; See also Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapter on Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press, 2005).
[447] Virno, *Multitude*, 108.
[448] Ibid.

Schmitt, Virno clearly sides with the former because, for him, decision is the prerogative of every linguistic animal, immanent to language use itself. For Schmitt, on the other hand, it is only the sovereign who decides, or has the right to decide.[449] Nevertheless, to return to the issue of jokes, it could be argued that to make a joke is to exploit the ambiguity immanent in rule-following, to apply a semiotic rule in an unexpected way that simultaneously illustrates the arbitrariness of the established and customary application of it. By illustrating the ambiguity and arbitrariness of a particular norm, a joke is able to destabilise and transform a way of life, despite being, as it were, a form of behaviour still within the confines of *obeying* a rule. Virno's point is that even in the most blind rule-following, there is a moment of potential transformability. As Virno himself puts it, 'even the automatic continuing down the road was, for all intents and purposes, a *decision*.'[450] On this argument, rule-following always entails a looming moment or radical transformability, or, as Virno phrases it, 'every humble application of a norm always contains within itself a fragment of the "state of exception".'[451] This does not mean, however, that we always transform while following a rule. As I said above, creative transformations are rare, but they are made possible because of this gap between the semantic and the semiotic.

It can be inferred from this discussion of jokes that rule-following always entails a radical moment, a possibility of transformation. Even when we are dealing with clearly identifiable and prescriptive rules, the exact application can never be entirely specified. This hiatus between the norm and its realisation is what provides us with an ability to negate, to transform. In terms of freedom, we can say that freedom, in Virno's analysis, is something quite different from free choice. In Virno, freedom is linked to a decision, but this decision is a behaviour along the lines of habit, meaning to truncate, to obey a rule. What may seem to the untrained eye to be mindless repetition does, in fact, always encapsulate a moment of possible creativity, a potential to apply the rule unexpectedly, creatively. As related to freedom in religion, following Scripture, tradition or liturgy is not an abandoning of freedom in favour of submission, since all forms of rule-following always entail this fragment of the state of exception, the ability to go against the norm and apply the rule completely unexpectedly. This is also why a religious tradition changes over time.

Malabou and Virno suggest a potentially fruitful way to conceive of religious rules. Both authors argue against seeing rule-following as merely repetitive. For Malabou,

[449] Virno, *Multitude*, 113.
[450] Virno, *Multitude*, 109.
[451] Virno, *Multitude*, 74.

following a rule gives us the ability to use a skill creatively once it has become habituated, when it becomes second nature. Difference is built into the process of habit, always with the possibility of radical annihilation. What is more, Virno provides an account of how rule-following always entails an eliminable decision. Since it is the norm rather than the rule itself that determines how to implement a rule, there is always room for change, to apply the rule in an unexpected manner. This means that even the most rigorous of rules entails, as an irrepressible element, a potential for rupture. Malabou and Virno can thus be mobilised in support of the argument that a religious lifeworld may very well be structured by narratives, teachings and even rules, but these are always being reinterpreted and remade, for every act of application entails a potential for critique and transformation. Such an argument points us in the direction of religion conceived as context-dependent, flexible and alterable.

Identifying Agency in Religion: Implications for Practice

The analysis of the empirical material showed that religion was linked discursively to personal opinions and preferences and was contrasted with religion defined as authority and rules. But critical and genealogical analysis shows that what seems natural, almost self-evident, in regard to freedom, has in fact been the subject of controversy throughout history. Genealogical analysis indicates that freedom is not unequivocally understood as autonomy or freedom of choice. Accordingly, I have here set out to develop an alternative understanding of freedom, one that could serve social workers in their dealings with religion. This final section is devoted to clarifying the implications the theoretical insights of this chapter have for practice.

Saba Mahmood, commenting critically on secularism and its twin concept of freedom qua autonomy, says: 'Once this premise is granted, it is easy to assert that one can change one's beliefs just as easily as one might change one's dietary preferences or one's name.'[452] This striking comment could easily be a response to the interview material in this study in which religion is portrayed as idiosyncratic, with little binding effect whatsoever. So let us consider the issue of headscarves in Islam as a practical example of what is at stake in discourses on freedom, and so elucidate the downsides of making freedom synonymous with free choice.

Headscarves and the accompanying debate concerning freedom and coercion have been something of a bone in the throat for Western feminism. The problem arises because Muslim women removing their veil or hijab is often regarded as a sign of

[452] Saba Mahmood, 'Religious Reason and Secular Affect: An Incommensurable Divide,' in Wendy Brown ed., *Is Critique Secular? Blasphemy, Injury, and Free Speech* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 75.

their emancipation.[453] Western feminists fail to notice their own condescending stance in this regard: they implicitly claim that only Western women are free and thus in a position to liberate the Other, in this case Muslim women, from their linen prisons. Liberation thus falls into its own trap, as it were.

Slavoj Žižek has remarked that it is only when the wearing of a veil or hijab is associated with personal choice that the act is seen with gentle eyes. Or, to link back to the discussion above, religion should not be authoritarian, and thus wearing a hijab must be an act of free choice. The paradox is that when a hijab becomes an expression of individual will, it is no longer an expression of belonging to a community. Any communal ties and forms of belonging are severed in a liberating act by which it becomes solely an expression of idiosyncrasy. Žižek says that 'the "subject of free choice" […] can emerge only as the result of an extremely *violent* process of being torn out of a particular lifeworld, of being cut off from one's roots'.[454] Rather than liberating someone, what is happening is that the person is being forced to abandon their communal roots in favour of a liberal idea of freedom – freedom qua unrestrained will. Alain Badiou says this eloquently in his crude remark: 'Become like me and I will respect your difference',[455] which is often what liberation really means.

The argument made here is that if social workers adopt, full-heartedly and unequivocally, a definition of freedom as unrestrained will, they may potentially become guardians of free choice as the one true freedom. Their attempts to have their clients adopt a secularist/liberal standpoint on freedom can amount to working to cut these clients off from their roots, as Žižek says. This is unlikely to yield the desired results. If social workers are trying to impose freedom of choice on clients by referring to free choice as the essence of religion, then their approach is nothing more than an affirmation of how the only way to be a Muslim in the West is to abandon one's communal roots in favour of an abstract, liberal/Western will. One has to become rootless, as it were, to be able to neutrally choose from a smorgasbord of religious practices in an idiosyncratic manner. Any other form of belonging, that is to say, any belonging at all, in a religious citizen may be viewed with suspicion.

Seeking to persuade clients to abandon their communal, cultural or religious roots is likely to further fuel the prejudicial idea that it is impossible to be a Muslim in Western societies (or at least, a Muslim who draws the lines between politics and religion, private and public in a non-Westernised manner). This prejudice has become

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[453] Saba Mahmood, *The Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), 21.
[454] Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (London: Profile Books, 2008), 124.
[455] Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* (London: Verso, 2013), 25.

ever more clear in the aftermath of 9/11 and the War on Terror as Muslim groups have been harassed and scrutinised because of their faith and cultural belonging.[456] If social workers are saying that Muslims believe in the wrong way, as some practitioners tended to do in chapter 3, then this may add to the feeling of having to suppress one's heritage in order to be a legitimate member of a Western culture. Any such work would risk becoming counterproductive, as it is exactly this feeling of not being welcome, of not being a part of a community, that is often the source of extremism, criminality and all the other social problems that social workers try to prevent. Much has been written on confrontations within social work, particularly from the perspective of motivational interviews[457] and non-confrontational social work. Is argued that social work would do better in developing emphatic meetings, listening and long-term relations with clients, rather than confronting them and/or attack their worldviews.[458] I agree with these arguments, and what I would like to add to this discussion is that a relatively narrow understanding of freedom may potentially be translated into confrontational practice. From this standpoint, operating with a more nuanced and complex understanding of freedom could also mean more productive social work.

To enable a more productive work environment with religion and issues of freedom, this chapter has been working out an alternative to autonomy that construes seemingly submissive acts as forms of agency. Agency, here, does not necessarily mean unrestrained will but may very well emerge in harmony with norms, traditions and even rules. There is a good example of how a seemingly submissive religious act entails agency in the work of Saba Mahmood. During the debate on free speech in the aftermath of the Mohammed caricatures published in the Danish *Jyllandsposten* in 2005, Mahmood says that piousness and embodied practices that follow the Sunna rather strictly are

> the result of a labor of love in which one is bound to the authorial figure through a sense of intimacy and desire. It is not due to compulsion of 'the law' that one emulates the Prophet's conduct, therefore, but because of the ethical capacities one has developed that incline one to behave in a certain way.[459]

[456] Leandro Schclarek Mulinari, 'The Spectrum of Repression: Swedish Muslims' Experiences of Anti-terrorism Measures,' *Critical Criminology* 27, no. 3 (2019): 451–66, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10612-019-09462-8; Vicki Coppock and Mark McGovern, '"Dangerous Minds"? Deconstructing Counter-Terrorism Discourse, Radicalisation and the "Psychological Vulnerability" of Muslim Children and Young People in Britain', *Children & Society* 28, no. 3 (2014): 242–56, https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12060.

[457] Cf. William R. Miller and Stephen Rollnick, *Motivational Interviewing: Helping People Change* (New York: Guilford Press, 2013).

[458] Marcus Herz and Thomas Johansson, *Det professionella mötet: En grundbok* (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2019); Greta Marie Skau, *Mellan makt och hjälp: Om det flertydiga förhållandet mellan klient och hjälpare* (Stockholm: Liber, 2007).

[459] Mahmood, Religious Reason and Secular Affect, 71–72.

Despite being a radical form of submission, a strict following of the law is an act of love. This is a perfect example, I think, of how a framework of sense-making can better serve practitioners, who then would be able to see how a specific act becomes meaningful as an act of love, not of coercion. When attention is shifted away from doctrines as slavishly repeated and from religion as inner beliefs and personal choice into an understanding of religion as situational and context-dependent, it is easy to see that freedom cannot and should not be reduced to the liberation of the will. The will always exists in a context; it is shaped by liturgy, social organisation, language and stories. In other words, there is no agency without structure, there is no freedom without degrees of compliance.

6. PUT THE RELIGIOUS BACK INTO RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

In the preceding three chapters, I have examined the possibility of working out a different notion of religion compared to a secularist notion. Continuing along these lines and drawing out the implications of this alternative concept, I now suggest that social work with religious citizens should preferably be conducted on the terms and premises of the clients, rather than, say, launching a drastic external critique of some religious practices. The investigations here show that the potential for change implicit in religious language itself could be used and mobilised. Thus those working with interreligious dialogue and other communication tools available to social workers could benefit from paying attention to the religious lifeworld.

The main purpose of this chapter is to investigate the potential status and function of religious language, framed through the question of how welfare social work can work with religious actors. Religious actors are increasingly involved in welfare social work, either as experts on specific issues or (a noticed in the material), as in the case of civil society, as working with social problems or poverty.[460] Religious dialogue forums have also risen in importance within work to prevent extremism, as is noticeable in the interview material of this study. These forums potentially offer practitioners a way to reach a target group – the religious community – and also provide practitioners with knowledge and information on religious matters. What is investigated here is the role religious language can play in interreligious dialogue, where secular and non-secular citizens meet.

I begin by analysing the philosophy of Jürgen Habermas, who has written extensively on religion in the public sphere, and conclude that although he contributes significantly to our understanding of the predicament here, his option of translating

[460]Cf. Ram Cnaan, Robert Wineburg and Stephanie Boddie, *The Newer Deal: Social Work and Religion in Partnership* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

religious claims into neutral terms is somewhat problematic. Habermas, in my opinion, places too strong an emphasis on reciprocity and harmony, thus downplaying the necessary elements of risk and conflict in dialogue. The main point of my critique of Habermas is to show that it is unproductive to tear someone out of their lifeworld through a reciprocal learning process which demands that all actors formulate their claims in neutral language. By doing so, something valuable is lost. Attempts to change behaviours may be more productive when the critique of a particular tradition or behaviour is not totally external, that is, formulated from outside the lifeworld in a drastically different (neutral) language. If religious actors are more likely to change and alter some of their views or behaviours when critique is formulated in terms of their own lifeworld, then perhaps religious language is beneficial.

In investigating a strategy of mobilising religious language for the purposes of social work, it is necessary to examine in detail the relation between religion and some of the ideas and ideals of social work, such as gender equality, pacifism, democracy and human rights. Focusing on the issue of gender equality, it became apparent that religious actors have been vital in realising equality in the West. Thus there is a religious language for gender equality. Rather than excluding religious language in a Habermasian sleight of hand, why not mobilise it to fit the purpose of social work?

Religious Dialogue as an Instrument

In addressing the broader question of how welfare work can operate in regard to religious actors, the discussion is limited here to religious dialogue. The interest of religious dialogue in social work and work to prevent extremism in the contemporary era is seen as a reflection of how religion is increasingly identified as a potential source of social problems. Interreligious dialogue has, however, come to take on a rather different form than it did in its initial, ecumenical form. Initially, interreligious dialogue was driven by the churches, which recognised that 'a common organ of expression was necessary for the churches, and that its formation could not wait until they had achieved unity on matters of faith and order'.[461] Nathan Söderblom, a Swedish scholar, archbishop and peace advocate, stated, 'We cannot afford to remain separated and in a state of unnecessary impotence caused by our separation, up to the time when we shall be truly united in faith and Church organization.'[462]

Since 9/11, interreligious dialogue has moved more clearly into peacemaking, social work, and schools so that is now regarded as a means to prevent extremism and

[461] Leonard Swidler, 'The History of Interreligious Dialogue,' in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*, ed. Catherine Cornille (Wiley-Blackwell Companions to Religion, 2013), 5.
[462] Nathan Söderblom in Swidler, 'The History of Interreligious Dialogue,' 5.

promote tolerance and democracy. It is often said to have potential for remedying the conflicts between groups that are a fertile ground for violence, radicalisation and terrorism. As Fahy and Haynes have pointed out, interreligious dialogue has become something of a perceived antidote to the threat of radicalisation within Western liberal democracies.[463] Consequently interreligious dialogue is no longer principally organised by the churches but is instead regarded as a tool that states and municipalities can use to achieve certain political goals. For example, the UN asserts that '[p]romoting a true dialogue among civilizations and religions is perhaps the most important political instrument that we can use to reach out across borders and build bridges of peace and hope'.[464] On this basis, interfaith forums become indispensable. But this perspective also means that the form of interreligious dialogue has changed drastically from being an 'awe-filled embrace of the inner spirit and aesthetic expressions of the Other'[465] into a tool for secular peacemaking.

In the empirical material for this study, several interviewees talk about their use of interreligious dialogue as a means to prevent extremism and to get insights into the nature of religious discourse, something the participants in interreligious dialogue are said to have. Religion and interreligious communication are here tied to ideas about how to mitigate and reduce conflict and polarisation. Anne has this to say regarding the school project she works in:

> She [the main project leader] is like the mother in this project and she has worked within the church for many years and has had some contact with people … that we should do something, something to improve well, yeah, safety and communication between people and different groups and so. And then she has had contact with people in the church who have had contact with this centre, which works exclusively with these issues really. Interreligious, I mean it is dialogue […] Here you work a lot with groups from different religious traditions who meet in book circles and discussions and seminars and so. And that is the whole purpose of the centre; to increase dialogue between groups.

Anne's words link interreligious work to communication and suggest that it may serve the purpose of improving dialogue and understanding between groups.

Linda further gives us a picture of how reflection on religion and dialogue between religious groups may be beneficial when it comes to issues such as prejudice and polarisation. When describing her work and how one of her projects evolved, she says:

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[463] John Fahy and Jeffrey Haynes, 'Introduction: Interfaith on the World Stage,' *Review of Faith & International Affairs* 16, no. 3 (2018): 5, https://doi.org/10.1080/15570274.2018.1509278.
[464] Reina C. Neufeldt, 'Interfaith Dialogue: Assessing Theories of Change,' *Peace and Change* 36, no. 3 (2011): 344–72, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0130.2011.00702.x.
[465] Swidler, 'The History of Interreligious Dialogue,' 6.

> But it was expanded quite quickly and we saw the need to … that there are prejudices and polarisation between the majority and most importantly Islam. And then in different periods … and now we work with the Jewish congregation, with young people with a Sikh background and, yes, all young people that see that you could need a space to reflect upon religion, to talk about religion in a safe environment.

In this quotation, although religious dialogue is seen as a way to approach prejudices and polarisation, perhaps linked to an emphasis on peace, the idea that young people could 'need a space to reflect upon religion, to talk about religion in a safe environment' harks back to the earlier ideals of ecumenical work.

Linda further explained the rationale and purpose of her projects:

> So to make that story for them, to make the story for those that have prejudices about a different religion. Because you live in your own bubble and society is so segregated and we go to totally different schools; white schools and schools with … with very few white people if we take that categorisation, which is not easy. But majority and minority religions if you say so. So it came out of a need to … where we can see that there is polarity and then there is a need to reflect upon something nice but which is shamed in society and which perhaps finally becomes the only thing you hold on to. Then the story gets really thin, and it risks becoming extreme.

Issues such as polarisation and conflict, racism and Islamophobia can in Linda's view be prevented or mitigated through projects related to religious dialogue. At the end of the quotation, Linda also links dialogue and extremism by saying that when there is little room for reflection on religion, there is a risk that the story and the interpretations will become extreme. Personal storytelling and religious dialogue thus become a way to prevent extremism, as well as other problems such as polarisation and prejudices and these practices described by Linda is a part of her broader work to prevent radicalisation and conflict. In Linda´s work, religious dialogue both has features that are similar to the early church dialogues, as a cultivation of faith, but simultaneously becomes a method or procedure in peacemaking and preventing radicalisation.

Part of the work described by Linda, as she tells me during the interview, is to show that cooperation between religious groups or traditions is possible. This is one of the primary purposes of Lind´s work, where they visit school classes and similar and show that an imam and a minister, or a Muslim and a Christian, can work together in harmony. A similar link between cooperation and interreligious dialogue is expressed by Anne, who says that her work is also to 'I mean, … show good examples of cooperation between religions'. That is, religious dialogues become ways to show that religions are by no means naturally hostile towards one another, and that there is potential for unity and harmony among different religious traditions. Thus both

quotations here imply that religious dialogue has become a kind of tool or a way to work with issues such as extremism, and also more broadly with polarisation, racism and conflict. Interreligious dialogue is not merely practices for the sake of the religious people who partake in them, but has the function of showing that religious traditions may peacefully coexist.

Another of the interviewees, Margarethe, who is a social worker, elaborates on her view of how religious dialogue can serve as an instrument in her work:

> And then they come from all congregations. And everybody that has been sitting in these round-table discussions and talked, we have had a lot of meetings, they are all on-board. They hug and greet each other, and they have also felt that it is important that they walk hand-in-hand when something happens. To show that this has nothing to do with religion. We agree with each other, we help each other.

Margarethe identifies a relationship between successful dialogue and a more unified front. A result of dialogue is that different congregations or members from congregations can be united in times of chaos or when something problematic happens in their part of the city. That is to say, religious dialogue is an effective and fruitful way to better relations between groups, which further has potentially positive effects on the community and in relation to social problems such as extremism or conflicts.

To link back to the discussion about the changing role of interreligious dialogue after 9/11, we can see that dialogue sometimes becomes a tool for practitioners not merely (or even principally) to cultivate religious beliefs, as it was for the ecumenical movements, but also to mitigate or prevent specific social problems such as conflicts or prejudices. A quotation from Margarethe in which she elaborates on her work with dialogue and with religious congregations further elucidates this turn towards a more pragmatic attitude towards interreligious dialogue:

> And we have these discussions. It is quite exciting, particularly when talking about freedom of religion. And the imam says: 'Does that imply my daughter too?' Yes. 'What! Terrible country!' Or you talk about, it was an LGBTQ week in the city with the pride flag everywhere. So they thought, some of the Muslims and some Christians got together, against the city. So they realised that they had common opinions, that they agreed when it came to that question. And then you could see that some issues [are common in many different religions]. So you learn that. I mean: you think this and that is not … but you have the same god as her and she thinks like that. Aha, that's right. What happened now? And then you can talk about that. And that these are opinions. It is not God-given: this is my interpretation, my faith, and my fear. And that is really exciting. So these meetings, we have learned

> a lot when we do these round-table-discussions. […] So we spread the congregations out, and a civil service representative at each table. And sometimes we discuss rather difficult issues.

This quotation relates the rationale for dialogue to certain ideals, such as freedom of religion. The examples given seems to suggest that some religious groups are against women's rights and LGBTQ rights,[466] but that this can still have a positive effect in that they can see that it is possible to be unified on some matters. Margarethe also adds that these forums show that ideas are not divinely sanctioned, they are not 'God-given but are 'my interpretation, my faith, my fear'. Nevertheless, what the example shows is that religious dialogues become a way for the authorities or the municipalities to influence religious groups in order to better relations and prevent conflict and radicalisation. To use a bit more critical formulation, we can say that religious dialogue tends to be instrumentalised in work to prevent extremism.

Before discussing how the purposes of interreligious dialogue could be understood theoretically, let me include one final relevant quotation. Carl, an academic who has worked with practitioners is critical of how religious dialogue has become so linked to work to prevent extremism:

> I am quite sceptical about the interreligious conversations and so on. Because it is a very specific genre that works with some types of religion and with some types of religious representatives that are interested in and can engage in dialogue and debate between religions, whatever that is. And I have been asked to take part of this of course. So [interreligious dialogue] is also an answer to the threat of extremism. That religious representatives, and we academics, shall meet and point to where peaceful coexistence is and so. The demand [for interreligious dialogue] has emerged parallel to this development to, I would say.

According to Carl, interreligious dialogue is now requested as a way to prevent extremism and has become something of a tool that experts and religious representatives are supposed to use to identify points of convergence between different religious traditions. Carl, however, is sceptical about the effectiveness of these forums because they tend to be filled with a very specific kind of people who are interested in dialogue. In other words, religious dialogue means something to the already initiated, but may have very limited effects on the community at large.

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[466] I have had some difficulties interpreting this quotation because of the way she seems to imply that these problematic sentiments in her clients have an almost positive effect. I am not really sure how to interpret her views here. But the point I wish to make by quoting her is that dialogue becomes a tool in reaching a specific goal, for instance to show the participants that they may be unified in certain matters, despite having different faiths or belonging to different religious traditions.

What the analysis above shows is that there are reasons to accept the idea proposed in research that interreligious dialogue has become an important instrument for practitioners in their work to prevent extremism and promote democracy. We could further notice how dialogue is being linked to specific goals or ideals such as peacemaking, tolerance and freedom of religion. By becoming a way to combat social problems and conflicts, interreligious dialogue is not merely instrumentalised, it is also linked to unification and consensus that become goals or tokens of success in relation to dialogue.

Translation and Reciprocal Learning Processes

We have seen that interreligious dialogue has come to enter social work and related disciplines via work to prevent extremism and promote democracy. This and the following section launch a theoretical investigation into the potential role religious dialogue could have more broadly in social work. I do this through a (critical) analysis of the philosophy of the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas and his discourse theory, which deals with issues of religious language. I will focus in particular on his argument for mutual translations in the public sphere.

Habermas's discourse theory already has some sway in social work. He has provided social work with a theoretical argument for face-to-face interaction and dialogue as a potential rectification of what is considered to be a too instrumental approach to social problems in social work.[467] As a member of the Frankfurt school, and following the broad trajectory laid out by Adorno and Horkheimer,[468] Habermas argues that the Enlightenment and modernisation have an oppressive side, which he terms 'colonisation of the lifeworld' [*Lebenswelt*] by which the lived world is incorporated into a bureaucratic mode of life. From the standpoint of a Habermasian view of discourse, social work would do well in adopting such a view since that would make it able to ward against instrumentality by placing dialogue, democratic debate and face-to-face interaction with clients in the foreground. Julia Shaw, whose work is highly influenced by Habermas, has further argued for a post-secular social work characterised by a reworking of the boundaries of private and public social work. She argues for a model of social work that transgresses the idea of religion as a private spiritual project and allows for new productive encounters between secular and religious actors within social work. A post-secular social work can subvert (neo)liberal and secular hegemonies in social work and 'represents a hopeful vision for the future of social

[467] Stephen A. Webb and Mel Gray, *Social Work: Theories and Methods* (London: Sage, 2008), Chapter 1.
[468] See Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (London: Verso, 1997).

work whereby solidarity between social workers and faith-based organisations is enhanced', Shaw says.[469]

In theorising on how religious actors can be integrated into welfare social work, Habermas's theories on how religious actors and secular citizens can coexist within the confines of a public sphere are of utmost relevance. He argues staunchly against exclusive secularism in the public sphere. For social work, this means that when entering into dialogue and collaborations with religious actors, state-employed social workers need to reflect on the premises for doing so and avoid treating religion as the irrational Other of secular discourse. Habermas's thought on post-secular translations undoubtedly hits a nerve with his proposition that both religious and secular claims need to be translated into neutral terms, otherwise there can be no genuine encounters or learning processes. But what does he mean by this?

Beginning with the realisation that the contemporary era is best described as post-secular, as a time of reinvigoration of the religious, Habermas addresses the sociological and philosophical implications of this reinvigoration. Sociologically, religion persists and continues to be relevant and influential in public discourse. But the post-secular condition demands more than simply noting this societal change. It also warrants philosophical reflection:

> How should we see ourselves as members of a post-secular society and what must we reciprocally expect from one another in order to ensure that in firmly entrenched nation states, social relations remain civil despite the growth of a plurality of cultures and religious worldviews?[470]

It is principally this philosophical aspect of post-secularism that is of relevance here.

Habermas sees the revitalisation of religion as demanding something of the secular state. From the standpoint of social cohesion, he identifies post-secular plurality as a source of conflict and antagonism. The question that drives him is how cohesion can be assured, despite metaphysically diverging opinions and worldviews. This has always been at the heart of the Habermasian project, although lately religion is gaining a slightly different status. In his earlier work he was informed by secularisation theory and argued, with a Weberian slant, that ritualistic forms of integration and cohesion have lost much of their value and been displaced by rational communication and consensus, although an important aspect of his work is to expand upon and clarify Weber´s concept rationality For Habermas, goal-rationality is merely one aspect of

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[469] Julia Shaw, 'Introducing Post-Secular Social Work: Towards a Post-Liberal Ethics of Care,' *British Journal of Social Work* 48, no. 2 (2018): 424, https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcx036.

[470] Jürgen Habermas, 'Notes on a Post-Secular Society,' *New Perspectives Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (2008), 21, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5842.2008.01017.x.

rationality, not its full spectrum as it is for Weber (in Habermas' reading).[471] In that period, Habermas treated religion as an impediment to rational discourse because it 'does not leave the religious participants in discourse free to enter the presuppositionless space of rational communication, but instead equips them with clear directives concerning the goal of the discourse'.[472] A citizen entering the public sphere should rid themself of metaphysical assumptions, a demand that is particularly challenging for religious citizens, according to the early Habermas.

In his later writings on the post-secular, Habermas, to some extent at least, detaches himself from this view of religion as an obstacle to rational communication. He argues that the (re)politicization of religion – religion's persistence and refusal to yield to secularist doctrines – actualises a reformulation of the neutral sphere of rational communication. What is now needed is a *via media*, a middle road, one where secularism and religion can coexist and engage in dialogue. The problem Habermas sees with contemporary religious plurality is that narrowminded secularism and equally narrowminded religious orthodoxy pose a threat to rational discourse: 'The two countervailing trends conspire, as though in a division of labor, to jeopardize the cohesion of the polity through ideological polarization when neither side exhibits a willingness to engage in self-reflection'.[473] His plea for a *via media* is an attempt to provide a way out of this deadlock.

But what, more precisely, would such a *via media* entail? At the heart of it, a *via media* is the space of translations of metaphysical claims into neutral terms. Habermas begins with the assumption that rational discourse must be founded on universally accessible language. In order for this to occur within a post-secular society, both secular and religious citizens are burdened with the task of transforming their claims into neutral terms. The term *translation* is vital here. The religious view of humans as an image of the divine (*imago dei*) can serve explain his meaning. What is demanded of religious citizens is that the Other be treated as part of the divine, as *sanctified*. Although grounded in a religious worldview, some aspects of this belief can be extracted and formulated in non-religious language as a secular concept of inviolable human rights. The concept thus retains its original force but becomes universally accessible.

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[471] See Jürgen Habermas, 'Handlingsrationalitetens aspekter,' in *Kommunikativt handlande: Texter om språk, rationalitet och samhälle*, ed. Anders Molander, trans. Mikael Carleheden (Göteborg: Daidalos, 1996), 83–110; Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*, Vol. 2, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987), 301–331.

[472] Michael Reder and Josef Schmid, 'Habermas and Religion,' in *An Awareness of What is Missing: Faith and Reason in a Post-Secular Age*, ed. Jürgen Habermas and Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge: Polity, 2010), 5.

[473] Jürgen Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge: Polity, 2008), 2.

In order to avoid an asymmetrical burden being imposed on religious citizens, secularism too needs to be renegotiated. It is not enough to demand that the religious other is met with respect. What is demanded is a '*self-reflexive overcoming* of a rigid and exclusive secularist self-understanding of modernity,' Habermas says.[474] For Habermas, such an insight would have direct political implications in the sense that it legitimises a reworked secular position. And this is the essence of his term 'post-secular', which he defines as

> the insight by secular citizens that they live in a post-secular society that is *epistemically adjusted* to the continued existence of religious communities first requires a change in mentality that is no less cognitively exacting than the adaptation of religious awareness to the challenges of an ever more secularized environment. In line with this changed yardstick, the secular citizens must grasp their conflict with religious opinions as a reasonably expected disagreement […] However, this cognitive precondition indicates that the version of an ethics of citizenship I have proposed may only be expected from all citizens equally if both, religious as well as secular citizens, already have undergone complementary learning processes.[475]

Post-secular complementary learning processes can occur when religious consciousness becomes reflexive by being operative in a context where it needs to relate its articles of faith to other systems of belief, and to scientific accounts of reality that may be at odds with religious faith (Habermas often assumes that science and religion are at odds with one another). The same goes for the secular state, however, which needs to be reflective as not to impose 'asymmetrical obligations on its religious citizens'.[476] Mutual learning is possible through a recognition of secularism's inextricable relation to its religious heritage, accompanied by a demand from the secular state on its secular citizens not to treat religion as irrational.

As already stated, this argument indicates an at least partial divergence from Habermas's earlier thought. Harrington says that Habermas now 'recognizes something like a theological lacuna, a lack or blind spot in his own work', something that cannot be ignored.[477] By attempting to counter a 'modernization threatening to spin out of control',[478] Habermas proposes that religion needs to be recognized as not merely representation, subordinate to philosophy (as for Hegel). However,

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[474] Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, 138, my italics.
[475] Jürgen Habermas, 'Religion in the Public Sphere,' *European Journal of Philosophy* 14, no. 1 (2006): 15, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0378.2006.00241.x.
[476] Jürgen Habermas, 'An Awareness of What is Missing,' in *An Awareness of What is Missing: Faith and Reason in a Post-Secular* Age, ed. Jürgen Habermas and Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge: Polity, 2010), 21.
[477] Austin Harrington, 'Habermas and the "Post-Secular Society"', *European Journal of Social Theory* 10, no. 4 (2007): 543–560, https://doi.org/10.1177/1368431007084370.
[478] Habermas, 'An Awareness of What is Missing,' 18.

Habermas's treatment of religion is still largely functionalistic. Although reluctant to adhere to some aspects of Kant's thought, Habermas largely follows the coordinates laid out by him and recognizes a potential in Kant's philosophy of religion, a philosophy that treats religion as a potential vehicle for moral reasoning. Religion may provide motivation for and have a binding potential for an ethical community,[479] and offers a way out of a 'hollowing modernization', as Habermas puts it. In a critique of this functionalistic approach, Slavoj Žižek says that Habermas is 'engaged in a kind of ideological vampirism, sucking the energy from naïve believers without being ready to abandon his own basic secular-liberal stance, so that full religious belief retains a kind of fascinating and mysterious Otherness'.[480] Although striking as always, Žižek might be overly severe in his critique of Habermas here.

Habermas is correct in suggesting that the age of unopposed secularity is over and that the public arena needs to be conceived of differently. So what use is there of his theories in social work? The blurring of boundaries and responsibilities between social work conducted by welfare state agencies and civil society organisations seems to have enabled and promoted co-operations between welfare agencies and religious civil society, as noted in the introduction of this thesis. The social workers and other practitioners interviewed for this study acknowledge the importance of knowledge of religious and theological matters in order to carry out their tasks. In seeking to prevent or address certain social problems, they identify potential in religious civil society and its ability to reach out to and talk with the religious community. Religious civil society has thus become an important partner, and by organising religious dialogues as ways to influence the religious community and to foster learning between groups, social work has begun to take the religious community seriously.

Within this context, Habermas's model of public discourse is useful for social work as it delineates the main issues when trying to include religious actors in the public sphere. Habermas is strikingly on point when he claims that if religion is to have a role to play in cohesion, which I believe is exactly what the interviewees above are striving for, then it is not only religious citizens who must translate their claims. Secular citizens, too, must be ready to translate their claims into universally accessible terms. However, I am still reluctant to adhere to the Habermasian position of mutual translations. This is so because such a project bears with it a risk of treating religion as irrational, despite aspirations to the contrary (as alluded to in an overly strong fashion by Žižek). More importantly, I believe that religious language can hold a key to genuine encounters between groups, which otherwise risk becoming nothing more

[479] Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, chapter 8.
[480] Slavoj Žižek, *Less than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (London/New York: Verso, 2013), 224.

than tokenistic within a Habermasian framework. That is, there are reasons to suspect that claims should not be translated at all. The next section discusses the idea of translation in Habermas critically as a way to work out what potential function religious dialogue could have in social work.

The Problems with Translation

There are some resemblances between Habermas's argument and how interreligious dialogue is conceived of and organised to prevent extremism. Both regard language and dialogue as holding a seed for consensus-making, and thus for peacemaking. The primary purpose of interreligious dialogue is to increase dialogue between different groups, as several of the interviewees for this study phrased it. There is an idea that conflicts can be reduced and potentially peacebuilding strategies are developed by finding a common language, a common medium, through religious dialogue. Particular religious or cultural language is regarded as merely a step towards a universally accessible language. The academic interviewed in this study, Mark, alludes to this issue when he critically remarks that interreligious dialogue tends to become a way to 'build a new religion, out of the old ones' by constructing this common language. Rather than letting various languages enter into dialogue and possible polemic with one another, the rationale is to produce an entirely new language, which in some ways echoes Habermas' emphasis on universally accessible language.

This section examines some of the objections to Habermas in order to investigate whether social work should appropriate a theory of public discourse such as the one favoured by Habermas. Habermas's proposition has been thoroughly criticised. He has been accused of naivety because of the way he articulates a belief in the prospects of rational communication to reduce antagonism, a project that, from a Marxist point of view, is neither tenable nor desirable. Chantal Mouffe is one of Habermas's most prominent and staunch critics, with her counter-argument that antagonism is both ineliminable and necessary for democracy. If antagonism is neutralised in a Habermasian gesture, democracy as such ceases to exist and what remains is a further entrenching of hegemonic orders, according to Laclau and Mouffe.[481]

A more relevant critique from the perspective of dialogue in social work relates to Habermas's understanding of language. He identifies in language a seed for unification and consensus, a pre-discursive mutual understanding. Confusion in language is a distortion, a poison, for Habermas. Language in its pure form, however, is the key

[481] See Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London: Verso, 1985); Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso, 2009); Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (London: Routledge, 2005).

to peace. In contrast to this view, Paolo Virno suggests that language principally has the function of non-identification. Primordial recognition, enabled by the way our mirror neurons produce reciprocal identification and intraspecies recognition, is not more fully realised or accomplished through language. On the contrary, language intervenes, interrupts, and disrupts this original harmony. It does so by *negation*, which is the essence of language use according to Virno. Through language, non-recognition is possible; this is *not* a human.[482] Virno offers the example of the Holocaust as made possible by non-identification. Negation thus introduces difference and ambiguities into this primordial harmony. This does not mean that language is merely a poison, since it also contains the remedy to its own poison by being able to negate non-recognition. Virno terms this the *negation of negation*, not in a dialectical, Hegelian sense, but as a bulwark against the perils of language. What one could term *second order ambiguities* are introduced to hold the negative potential in language in check (albeit without eliminating it).

What is useful about Virno's argument for our purposes is his stress that dialogue and language are not necessarily harmonious. Conflicts for Virno derive from language and communication itself, in contrast to Habermas who sees conflict as divergences from an original harmony. If language's primary function is to negate rather than to produce harmony, then perhaps one should not strive for harmonious discourse in the way Habermas does. Negation introduces the possibility of distinguishing between individuals, it enables groups to be formed in the first place, just because of its ability for non-recognition. When working with religious dialogue, the aim should perhaps not be to eliminate any potential disharmony and conflict, but to engage in it and contain it by introducing further ambivalence. In practical terms, trying to find a neutral language could be futile, and one should instead allow polemics, allowing the differences of language to guide the process.

Lovisa Bergdahl has pursued this argument in a critique of Habermas's concept of mutual translation. As a variation of the argument by Mouffe that antagonism is essential to democracy, Bergdahl suggests that there is an untranslatable element in language that is both a limitation and an ethical promise of dialogue. In her view, there is no absolute reconciliation that awaits us at the end of the rainbow.[483] This is so

[482] Paolo Virno, *An Essay on Negation: Towards a Linguistic Anthropology*, trans. Lorenzo Chiesa (Calcutta/London/New York: Seagull Books, 2018).

[483] Lovisa Bergdahl, 'Lost in Translation: On the Untranslatable and Its Ethical Implications for Religious Pluralism,' *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 43, no. 1 (2009): 31–44, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9752.2009.00662.x. See also Lovisa Bergdahl, 'Seeing Otherwise: Renegotiating Religion and Democracy as Questions for Education' (PhD diss., Stockholm University, 2010).

because language always entails an untranslatable element, something linked to a specific lifeworld or culture that cannot easily be translated without losing much of its original connotations. Habermas, as we have seen, presupposes that content is preserved in translation, illustrated here with his argument that 'Religious traditions have a special power to articulate moral intuitions', a power that can translated and transformed from particular language 'into a generally accessible language.'[484] A 'generally accessible language' is key to understanding Habermas's claim, as with the example of translating the principle of *imago dei* into a secular concept of uninfringeable human rights. It is exactly this element in Habermas – the potential of finding common ground beyond specific metaphysical positions – that Bergdahl objects to.

For Bergdahl, any translation simultaneously implies a *transformation*, and so is always accompanied by a kind of loss. She stakes out her argument with the help of Walter Benjamin and his understanding of the task of translation. Using the example of the German *brot* and the French *pain*, Benjamin suggests that despite pointing to the same object – bread – the object and its symbolic sign have *different cultural meanings* in French and German culture. The two meanings are in fact mutually exclusive, agonistic.[485] The agonistic struggle of meaning indicates that translations are never complete; 'there is always a nucleus, a "kernel" or element of meaning *"that does not lend itself to translation*"', Benjamin proclaims.[486] His point is that translation, if to mean something deeper and more significant than a mere translocation of content, demands something profound of the participants. From this standpoint, translation can never be frictionless, smooth. Something is at stake in translation, something that encompasses the participants and their worldviews, and these may be at odds with one another.

Informed by Benjamin's argument, Bergdahl launches an attack against Habermas. Bergdahl argues that Habermas's rationale is underpinned by a desire to achieve a 'win-win situation of mutual understanding', but by doing so, Habermas also eliminates the potential for change in public discourse.[487] In striving to produce harmonious discourse and win-win situations, the risks of conflict, and thus also the potential benefits, are lost. When there is no risk, there is not much to gain, since nothing really changes. In Bergdahl´s view, to be engaged in translation also means the risk of being changed, or having one's ideas and worldviews challenged, a process

[484] Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion*, 131.
[485] Walter Benjamin, *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, trans. J.A. Underwood (London: Penguin, 2009), 35.
[486] Benjamin cited in Bergdahl, 'Lost in Translation,' 34–35.
[487] Bergdahl, 'Lost in Translation,' 35.

that is anything but frictionless. Bergdahl further suggests that this untranslatable element in language – an element pertinent not merely between but also within a language – converts the act of translation from mere communication into an ethical act: '[T]ranslation is not about you turning your language into mine but about me approaching you.'[488] Dialogue is not about finding superficial common ground, but of encountering the Other, seeing and moving towards the sacredness of this Other. This irreducible otherness cannot simply be circumvented or bridged through rational discourse. Habermas's idea of a shared pre-understanding that underlies even the worst of misunderstandings, and from which all participants can draw sustenance, allows him to shy away from the more transformative element of translation.

If we apply Bergdahl's argument to interreligious dialogue in social work, the implication is that for religious dialogues to be fruitful and meaningful, they must go beyond striving merely for smooth and frictionless colloquies. Returning briefly to the way religious language in work to prevent extremism and promote democracy was treated by one of the interviewees ('this is not God-given, but my interpretation, my fears'), what strikes me is that attempts to purify dialogue of metaphysical and particular language may risk becoming nothing more than an affirmation of secular language. This is a far cry from the Habermasian ideal of reciprocity. The production of an entirely new language 'raises the question of how something unrecognised or "new" can enter public discourse (whether the newness is religious, as is the present concern, or of other kinds) without becoming just another variant of the "same", the already existing discourse', Bergdahl asks rhetorically.[489] Or to put it differently, if dialogue is a forum not merely for producing consensus but, more importantly, for mutual learning between groups of people, can we learn anything about each other if we simultaneously try to eliminate our differences?

I propose that the latter function – enabling learning and recognition between groups of people – should be the principal goal of interreligious dialogue. In some ways, this move could even imply a return to a more original understanding of interreligious dialogue as it was formulated in the ecumenical movement. Here, Otherness was not an obstacle to discourse, but that which makes it meaningful in the first place. Difference keeps us compelled, it instils an interest in the other in the first place and becomes an ethical demand, as Bergdahl says. What is fascinating about dialogue is thus also what is lost in translation in the striving for universally accessible language.

[488] Bergdahl, 'Lost in Translation,' 37.
[489] Bergdahl, 'Lost in Translation,' 34.

Is Religion an Impediment to Social Work Agendas?

There is another issue that needs to be investigated before reaching a conclusion about whether religious language ought to be retained in interreligious encounters and in encounters between secular and religious citizens. What needs to be investigated is whether religion itself poses an obstacle to that which dialogue is supposed to produce. As illustrated above, one of the main goals of religious dialogue when used as an instrument to prevent extremism and promote democracy was to cultivate values and ideals identified as a bulwark against conflicts and other social problems. Freedom of religion, tolerance and increased communication were linked to work with interreligious dialogue. On a broader note, social work can be said to be founded upon and tirelessly working to foster, cultivate and secure a basis for human rights, equality and democracy.[490]

Religion is also linked with and discussed in relation to violence, intolerance and oppression in the empirical material. Some parts of the interview material illustrate this, but before presenting excerpts from the interviews, a disclaimer may be in order: many of the interviewees were reluctant to depict religion as anathema to democracy or human rights, and many would deny that religion is particularly prone to becoming violent. And yet, the field of religion occupies a central space within the practical field of work to prevent extremism and promote democracy. In the analysis that follows, I shall provide a few examples of how religion is being linked to violence and intolerance, but these quotations are not representative of all of the interviewees in this study.

One of those interviewed was Richard who is an academic and freelance expert on terrorism. He was asked to participate in this study because of his role as a consultant in work to prevent extremism. During the interview he tells me that he is critical of how different forms of terrorism are lumped together in a single concept, such as terrorism or violent extremism. The problem, he says, is that there are differences in motives and motivations that ought not be neglected, and in particular there are differences between secular and religious terrorism. Asked to elaborate on this assertion, he replies:

> Secularly motivated, religiously motivated terrorism, is that what we are talking about? Yes, there are differences in motives because, if we look at what I mentioned before, as an example, the Baader-Meinhof group [*Rote Armee Fraktion*] or the Red Brigades [*Brigate Rosse*] or ETA [*Euskadi ta Askatasuna*] in Spain, that type of terrorism. When Baader-Meinhof did something – shot a NATO officer, or robbed a bank or whatever they were doing – there was always a political motive behind it.

[490] Cf. definition of social work, see https://www.ifsw.org/what-is-social-work/global-definition-of-social-work/

> I mean they did it to … to change society actually, but not to kill their enemies necessarily in the way religious terrorists, the religiously motivated terrorist does.

Here Richard distinguishes secular from religious terrorism by claiming that secular terrorism is related to political motives and is regarded as a means to the end of creating a different society, but that this is not the case with religious terrorism. Further, political terrorism is not about causing immense bloodshed; if that happens, it is more like a side effect. Religious terrorism, on the other hand, focuses on bloodshed and killing one's enemies.

Richard further elaborates his view:

> If Al-Qaeda steers an airplane into the World Trade Centre to kill people, then they do not care about going to prison or to dying, because they are fighting a war. And it can be the same with other religiously motivated terrorists too. I mean, this is a divine struggle that is being conducted. So if I were to say, can't we sit down, have a cup of coffee and discuss this? ... then no! because you are my enemy, and you must die for me to achieve what I want to achieve. So that is a totally different …

His argument is that the end-goal of religious terrorism is eliminating one's enemies whereas, in secular terrorism, the goal is to change society. The means used to change society may be violent, but violence is but a means, never an end in itself for secular terrorists. The implications for practice are that it is difficult to work productively with religious terrorists (and other ways than merely juristic or by policing), according to Richard, mainly because they are not ready to talk and discuss their terrorism. A divinely sanctioned struggle is unnegotiable, in his view, as expressed in his statement that you cannot discuss terrorism over a cup of coffee with a religious terrorist. The dichotomy in his quotation between secular and religious terrorism leads me to the conclusion that it would be possible to speak to a member of the Baader-Meinhof group about their terrorism, but not with IS soldiers. When working with religious terrorism, Richard says, one needs to understand that the tools that are useful when working with secular terrorism are no longer useful because discussion is hampered by religious demands. The only available argument would be that the terrorist is wrong. And 'good luck with that argument', he says sarcastically.

In the quotation from the interview with Richard, we can see that religion is being linked to immense bloodshed as well as to ideas about religion solely as something divinely sanctioned or non-political. That is to say, religion is something other than the political. This argument echoes much of what has been said in studies on new terrorism. Laqueur says that in the new religious terrorism, 'the element of propaganda has receded or even disappeared altogether, and the intention now is to wreak

as much destruction and havoc as possible.'[491] There are clear resemblances, I believe, between the interviewee above and Laqueur.

A different view of religion can be noticed in the work of Margarethe, a social worker. She tells me about parts of her work with religious dialogues and with religious citizens:

> And then come the Muslims with theirs, and the Sikhs with theirs, and if you could get them to do things together, and together with someone from us, I mean from the majority society, I think that would be really exciting. I think that would increase feelings of ethics, empathy, democracy, you could talk about human rights, about why children have it like that there … Is this that we have here something we want to cherish? We meet with the adults now and talk about democracy, and even with the congregations, and we have gone through human rights and that has been really hard. Really hard! Especially with freedom of religion. Are women equal? Really hard. But we make our way through it all the time.

In her work, two issues are described as particularly problematic when working with adults in certain groups: gender equality and freedom of religion. She signals this by saying that it is 'very difficult', but that they are 'make our way through it all the time. In my interpretation, the dialogue forums have a specific rationale here: it is about working with these difficult issues such as gender inequality or freedom of religion. This is the rationale and the purpose of religious dialogue.

If we take gender inequality as an example, which was highlighted in a few of the quotes above (for instance by Margarethe), the stress on the problem of the equality of women in certain cultures can be said to resonate with the much wider idea that gender equality in the West is an effect of intense secularisation.[492] Driven by secularisation, gender equality often becomes a token of progressive Western civilisation in general, with Islam portrayed as underdeveloped. This is done with the implication that Western culture is free of patriarchal violence and structures. As Sarah Farris has argued, heterogenous anti-Islam accounts all coalesce in their presentation of sexism and patriarchy as a particular Islamic phenomenon, exclusive to the Muslim other.[493] I am not suggesting that the previous interviewee is guilty of what Farris criticises. But I do believe that this whole structure of how Islam and religion is discursively being linked to patriarchy, which tends to relieve secular/liberal/humanist culture of any suspicions of patriarchy, reverberates in the quotation above.

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[491] Walter Laqueur, 'The New Face of Terrorism,' *The Washington Quarterly* 21, no. 4 (1998): 171–72, https://doi.org/10.1080/01636609809550356.

[492] See Joan Wallach Scott, *Sex and Secularism* (Princeton/New Jersey: Princeton University Press), 2018; Sarah R. Farris, *In the Name of Women's Rights: The Rise of Femonationalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

[493] Farris, *In the Name of Women's Rights*, 2.

On this same topic, Anne expresses concern about how religion is sometimes portrayed as directly hostile to some values esteemed in the West. She also draws attention to the potential downsides of having a priori assumptions about religion as hostile towards progress, here conceived of as democracy, gender equality and human rights. In her work with school classes in marginalised areas, teachers and others often assume that their religious students or clients are particularly intolerant or that there are many conflicts that originate from their diverging religious beliefs. She explains:

> So they say; 'well good, that is good because they really need to learn how to talk about this. You know, they need to tolerate each other'. Well actually, they talk quite easily. Of course there are conflicts emerging, I think. But to talk about it is not that hard. I don't think they think that. I think that the teachers think it is harder actually. Because most of them are you know, Swedish, a little anxious. And who also have prejudices of course and think that, as soon as somebody says something a little bit in that direction, then it is IS, you know. And that you paint the students into a corner. That you, 'ah, so you are against abortion,' but then you get so much against abortion. If someone attacks you like that, at that age too. That that is important to them. Yes, so they are painted into a corner, you become this, whatever it is … the one against abortion.

According to Anne teachers and others tend to assume that religious students are in special need of talking to each other. And perhaps more importantly, tolerating each other.[494] In her own experience, however, talking about these issues is quite easy and fruitful. The problem is in her view not so much that the students are intolerant, but that the teachers assume that they are, at least that is how I interpret her quotation. The risk of assuming a priori that these students are intolerant may lead practitioners to confront them, as in the case of abortion above. This paints the students into a corner and risks their becoming even more radical in their views and arguments.

Similar experiences as Anne's are expressed by another of the interviewees, Helen who works as a prison councillor and who has been involved in work and projects to prevent extremism in prisons. In her daily work with inmates and with conflicts, she tells me that people often express concerns about religion, saying that religion has caused wars throughout history. The Wars of Religion are frequently mentioned, as are the Crusades. In order to reduce stereotypes and perhaps also to mitigate conflicts in prisons, she tries to problematise this view of religion by saying that it may have

[494] For a detailed description of toleration discourses after 9/11 and its relation to liberalism, see Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

less to do with religion per se, and more with power struggles. Religion, in her argument, is more of an apologetic reason. She thus encounters ideas and claims about religion as being particularly violent frequently in her work, every week, she tells me.

The quotations above illustrate how religion tends to be linked with violence and misogyny, in some cases by practitioners and in other cases, by clients. So in the following section, these taken-for-granted assumptions are investigated genealogically with the assistance of literature on theological and philosophical history.

Secularism, Religion and Progressive Ideals

Picking up on Anne's argument in the previous section, the confrontational approach that she describes may be not merely unproductive, but directly *counter*productive. If a practitioner assumes that the religious views of clients or students are a source of intolerance (for example, by being against abortion) and then embarks on polemics when such views are expressed, clients are pushed towards a more radical position than they had at the outset. Clients or students with worldviews that diverge from the norm are painted into a corner where they are forced to defend their position, or so the interviewee believes. This, paradoxically, entrenches their views by making these views the object of reflection and internalisation, as I interpret her. That is why attempts to problematise or even debunk certain opinions have the opposite effect; they internalise them and perpetuate them, even in cases where the opinions were rather benign to start with. A case can thus be made that attempts to de-radicalise clients may further radicalise them.

The previous section includes examples of practitioners assuming that religious citizens may be particularly difficult to work with in regard to certain ideals such as peacemaking or gender equality. Are these assumptions justified? When working out a pragmatic attitude towards religious groups and religious dialogue, it is meaningful to investigate these assumptions historically and see how historical research conceptualise the relations of religion, secularism and intolerance.

Before delving into the history of secularism it should be made clear that I am not oblivious to the many cases of intolerance and violence in religion, as witnessed in history. The investigation here is justified by a pragmatic endeavour to work out a productive mode of social work in relation to religion and issues such as democracy, tolerance, human rights, and gender equality. In other words, my intentions are rooted in pragmatism, not apologetics.

Let me begin this inquiry with the example of human rights, which are inscribed in the very definition of social work. According to the *International Federation of Social Workers*, "[P]rinciples of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility, and

respect for diversities are central to social work."[495] Human rights are mentioned frequently by the practitioners interviewed for this study. As illustrative of this, Anne explains that in her project, she tries to link discussions with students to 'something bigger. That I am not making this up but that there is an idea of human's equal value that we begin in, and then use this idea in the classroom and that here too, everybody has the same value and that they can be listened to'. Margarethe, who is a social worker, also emphasise human rights in her work and expressed her awareness of the central role of human rights in on social work when she said:

> I saw Jan Eliasson [a Swedish politician] on TV when he left the UN, they filmed him and then he had the human rights declarations in a pocket format. So, I thought … well, everyone in this part of the town should have that. You are supposed to feel that, when I go into something. You should feel; what I do now, is that correct? You should always have that with you.

Margarethe further expressed how human rights can be used in the work to prevent religious social problems. In the quotation above she says that part of her work with religious groups and in her work to promote gender equality and freedom of religion was to tell them about (or teach them) human rights, something that she finds particularly difficult with certain groups.

This begs the question: How are human rights and religion related to each other? Is religion hostile towards human rights? And what role did religion play for the emerging of human rights in the West? Ola Sigurdson poses an interesting question in this regard. Rather than assuming that the esteem for human life and dignity in human rights discourse is something radically new in (late) modernity, one may instead wonder if all the talk about dignity, often simultaneously linked to excessive violence and crimes against humanity, is a sign that the valuing of human life is *threatened* in late modernity.[496] Regardless of what one may think of this argument, there can be no doubt that Christianity played an immense role in the emergence of human rights, formulated through a Christian view of the value of human life. As discussed above in relation to Habermas, not only is the doctrine of *imago dei* quite similar to human rights discourse, but it also is an important seedbed for them. However, this does not mean that these ideas are fundamentally the same. Human rights discourse took a different turn and formulated human dignity in juridical terms, which Christianity did not. Thus, despite being an important influence in human rights discourse, Christianity is not the sole explanation for the hegemony of human rights discourse in modernity.

[495] https://www.ifsw.org/what-is-social-work/global-definition-of-social-work/

[496] Ola Sigurdson, *Det postsekulära tillståndet: Religion, modernitet, politik* (Göteborg: Glänta produktion, 2009), 253.

However, Sigurdson's point is that human rights were not solely invented by liberalism. His point is rather that liberalism is more theological than it cares to admit and, vice versa, theology is more liberal than it is given credit for.[497] Hans Joas even suggests that Christianity occupies a central space in the emergence of human rights. However, he also adds that there is a reason why human rights suddenly gained prominence.[498] For Joas, this is largely a matter of *sacralisation*. In modernity, some religious expressions are de-sacralised[499] while other spheres or phenomena are sacralised instead.[500] Personhood (the individual) is one of the things that has been increasingly sacralised in modernity. Joas illustrates how sacralisation has migrated from the community to the individual by noting that before modernity, the most heinous crime was not murder but any crime 'which violates the sacred core of the community.'[501] By contrast, murder is now considered to be one of the worst of all crimes.

What becomes clear when consulting literature on theological and philosophical history is that although modernity is the age of human rights, one should not assume that this is so because of modernity's (supposedly) anti-religious tendencies. If religion was not an obstacle to human rights, and if secularism is not the answer to human rights, then one should perhaps not assume that religion is a threat to human rights. Working to excise religious language by forcing religious citizens to translate their religious claims into universally accessible terms in the manner suggested by Habermas, or by avoiding religious language in encounters between secular and religious citizens seems to me drastic and unnecessary. To get a better sense of why this is so, let's take the argument made above by Richard concerning religious violence and the inability to work with and talk to religious terrorists. Richard suggests that religious terrorists are unconcerned with politics since they see themselves as implicated in a divine struggle, with the purpose of destroying their enemies.

Let me problematise the clear-cut distinction made between divine struggle and secular struggle with the help of William Cavanaugh. In *The Myth of Religious Violence*, Cavanaugh problematises the distinction between religious and secular violence. One of the more pertinent rhetorical figures in the idea that there is a specific

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[497] Sigurdson, *Det postsekulära tillståndet*, 282

[498] Hans Joas, *The Sacredness of the Person: A New Genealogy of Human Rights*, trans. Alex Skinner (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013).

[499] For a detailed discussion on how the sacred and the profane relate to each other, see Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Carol Cosman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[500] Hans Joas, *The Power of the Sacred: An Alternative to the Narrative of Disenchantment*, trans. Alex Skinner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021). See also William Cavanaugh, *Migrations of the Holy: God, State, and the Political Meaning of the Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2011).

[501] Joas, *The Sacredness of the Person*, 49.

form of religious violence, clearly distinguishable from its secular counterpart, has its ground in the Enlightenment discussion that took hold in the aftermath of the so-called Wars of Religion. Philosophers such as Kant, Rousseau, Locke and Hobbes provided their own solutions to the problem that religion posed. For some, the solution to the problems with religion was to subordinate it to the sovereign power of the state (Hobbes), whereas for others, the antidote lay in turning religion into a private matter, irrelevant to political matters. Locke, whose role in the emergence of modern liberalism cannot be denied, is an example of the latter. In *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, Locke famously says:

> I esteem it above all things necessary to distinguish exactly the business of civil government from that of religion, and to settle the just bounds that lie between the one and the other. If this be not done, there can be no end put to the controversies that will be always arising between those that have, or at least pretend to have, on the one side, a concernment for the interest of men's souls, and, on the other side, a care of the commonwealth.[502]

Locke here establishes a distinction between the private and the public, writing as if it were there all along, although not realised until now. His solution to the problem posed by the religious wars was to separate the 'business of civil government from that of religion', as he puts it.

Cavanaugh suggests that the idea that religion is principally a matter of inner devotion, an idea to which Locke adheres, is not a timeless distinction. It reflects instead the discourse surrounding the Wars of Religion, which were not merely wars instigated by diverging religious interpretations, as is often held. Cavanaugh persuasively shows that these wars were equally territorial wars amongst churches, and between the churches and the emerging state. Ergo, these wars represented a *power struggle* and were not simply instigated by differences in religious interpretations. He offers many examples of co-operation between churches against the state, and of violence against others within the same religious tradition (Lutherans killing other Lutherans and Catholics killing other Catholics).[503] It is only retroactively, from a position when the state has secured its legitimacy as territorial master, that religion is portrayed as in its essence non-political. The migration of power from religion to the secular state was thus not a solution to the wars; it was in fact a cause of it. Against this background, by which the state sought to secure its place as the sovereign power, emerged an idea

[502] John Locke, 'A Letter Concerning Toleration', in *Two Treatises of Government and a Letter Concerning Toleration*, ed. Ian Shapiro, John Dunn and Ruth W. Grant (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2003), 218– 219.
[503] William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), Chapter 3.

that if religion transgresses the boundaries of the political, it may become as violent and barbaric as it was during the Wars of Religion. It is thus only by denying the place power struggles had in these wars that religion can be construed of as particularly prone to excessive violence. Thus, Cavanaugh suggests that 'the distinction between secular and religious violence is unhelpful, misleading, and mystifying, and it should be avoided altogether'.[504]

It can be deduced from this that the very idea that there is an essentially religious form of violence, distinguishable from secular violence, is a vast oversimplification that rests upon deficient terminology. To assume that religious actors are more violent and less likely to negotiate seems to be a drastic interpretation, and one likely to hinder fruitful discussion of violence (since discussion, in the interviewee's account above, is impossible and hence should never be attempted in the first place).

Finally, I address the issue of gender equality and religion, referred to in some of the quotations from the interview material analysed above, by which gender equality is held to be a particularly difficult subject when working with religious groups. This investigation is motivated not merely by the empirical material but further that gender equality has become something of a hallmark for work with religious citizens in general and as related to integration processes. For Farris, civic integration policies have been increasingly gendered, considered to be an institutionalisation of what she terms femonationalism in the form of an ideological formation that portrays Muslim (and other non-Western) women as in need of rescuing from patriarchy.[505] Thus, a critical discussion of secularism and gender equality is in order.

In her book *Sex and Secularism*, Joan Wallach Scott argues that secularism is not, despite what is commonly held, the cause of gender equality. In fact, when secularism was first formulated as a political doctrine, gender *in*equality and a gendered division of labour were crucial elements. At the time of the French Revolution, when secularism began to surface, gender inequality played a vital role for articulating a separation between the church and the state that launched modernity, Wallach Scott controversially asserts.[506] The power struggle between the church and the state over authority and sovereignty prompted attempts by secularist apostles to provide arguments for the exclusion of religion from the public, political domain. This was largely achieved by feminising the church. Religion became the irrational, feminine and affective, making up the private side of the dichotomy, whereas the public sphere was the realm of masculine, controlled, rational politics. As Wallach Scott puts it (quoting Paul

[504] Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence,* 56.
[505] Farris, *In the Name of Women's Rights*, chapter 3.
[506] Wallach Scott, *Sex and Secularism*, 3.

Seeley): '"the [French] Revolution's embodiment of the citizen as a rights-bearing and confessionally neutral male depended on a derogatory identification of religion with the female". Like the female sex, religion was considered the source of the irrational and the violent.'[507] Identifying the female sex with superstition and religious fervour became an argument for an exclusion from the political, which had controlled rationality as its hallmark and ideal.

This division of labour and the exclusion of women from the political was further given a naturalised twist by grounding it in biology and reproductive science, by which gendered division became conceived of as non-contingent and universal. This is well-known of course, but what Wallach Scott adds to the discussion is its relevance for secularism. Wallach Scott proposes that this gendered division of labour was crucial to secularism's exclusion of the religious from the public realm. Child-rearing activities, as women's lot, were entrenched and institutionalised. The standard tale of secularism is thus problematic: gendered divisions are 'not a relic of past practice but an invention of the discourse of secularism itself'.[508] Wallach Scott further identifies the conceit of secularism by defining what constitutes gender equality. In contemporary secularism, the public/private divide has been replaced with a view in which Western women are seen as sexually liberated, often with the argument that it is secularism that enabled this liberation.[509] While many inequalities have persisted throughout the reign of secularism, such as labour inequalities, economic inequalities and gendered violence, secularism frames the concept of equality in specific, epochal/historicist terms, always with the purpose of self-gratulation. When it comes down to it, the difference between the West and others on matters concerning sex is, according to contemporary secularist reasoning, a difference between 'the sexually liberated versus the sexually repressed'.[510]

It could be worth adding here that although Wallach Scott's book is skewed towards the West (and France more specifically), she gives examples of how colonial encounters also brought a gendered division of labour in other parts of the world. A gendered differentiation was exported to all the corners of the world through colonialism. In some cases, then, it seems that the Other's patriarchal structures are not a residual from pre-modern intolerance; rather, they are a secularist legacy that has influenced all parts of the world, and all religions. It could be worth keeping in mind, particularly

[507] Seeley cited in Wallach Scott, *Sex and Secularism*, 35.
[508] Wallach Scott, *Sex and Secularism*, 31.
[509] Wallach Scott, *Sex and Secularism*, 181.
[510] Wallach Scott, *Sex and Secularism*, 14.

when working with religion in a religiously plural society, that most religions have been shaped and moulded by secularist doctrines in this regard.

By way of conclusion, we can see that human rights, gender equality, and non-violence (to the extent that there is such a thing) are not solely the result of emancipation from the religious. As Wallach Scott suggests concerning gendered equality:

> The resistance to women's citizenship had less to do with the necessarily slow but inevitable progress of liberal democratic ideas than it did with a contradiction at the very heart of the political thinking that articulated them – a political thinking integral to the discourse of secularism.[511]

When progress occasionally occurred, this tended to be attributed to secularism and modernisation rather than to the economic conditions that enabled it.[512]

It seems to me that the same thing would apply to progress more generally, as analysed in this section. Secularist voices are sometimes too quick to assume that progress is always linked to anti-religious sentiments, when in fact economic, political, and power relations prove to be equally important. Returning to the issue of how religious actors are to be integrated in welfare social work, it seems that by assuming that religion poses an obstacle to the objectives of social work (realising democracy, human rights, tolerance, peace, and equality) practitioners may perhaps seek to relegate religious language from social work processes altogether. Working to realise the objectives of social work while assuming that religion itself may be an obstacle to it could lead practitioners into framing dialogue and encounters between groups in the type of secular/universal language Habermas prescribes. It would be better to mobilise religious language and make it useful for their own purposes. Or, to say the same thing, practitioners may strip discourse of religious and metaphysical language when, in fact, such language may be needed the most.

[511] Wallach Scott, *Sex and Secularism*, 90.
[512] Wallach Scott, *Sex and Secularism*, 157.

Gender Equality and a Critical Potential in Religious Language

To work out a proper approach to religious language in interreligious work and work with religious citizens in social work, we also need to consider another aspect of the relation between the objectives of social work and religion. Given that we can reject the idea that these objectives are in essence anathema to religion (although there are plentiful examples of intolerance in the name of religion, contemporary and historically), is it possible that there might even be a positive relation between them? Or, for my purposes, are there reasons to maintain religious language in social work and to see it as a *resource* instead of an impediment? Let me again exemplify this with a reflection from the field, provided by the interviewee Anne. In relation to her work with school classes and religious dialogue, she says the following:

> I mean Islam, that is really sensitive to the students to … for them, the Muslim students, particularly the girls as I experienced it, they are very good at reflecting and being critical of their own religion. And they could ask quite a lot of questions related to that. Does it have to be like that, can't it be like this instead? When they were given the chance. But when someone else did it, then they felt really exposed. So it was very clear that it has to come from them. You cannot like, try to save or redeem someone or straighten it out … that doesn't work. They need support when they do it themselves. And then you have to, like, be quiet perhaps with you own opinions. Like a non-religious or from another religion […]. Because there is such an infected view on Islam […], so it gets really sensitive for the adolescents. They feel very exposed when someone questions them. But then they can question a lot themselves. And that is interesting I think, especially when it comes to equality and that. To initiate a work with equality in any religion, I think it has to come from them. Otherwise, it can't be done.

Once again we encounter the view that confrontational work is often unproductive because critical reflection and reinterpretation must come from within religious practitioners themselves. And more importantly, as I read Anne, cultivating the language and the lifeworld from within is perhaps the most productive way to achieve change and productive encounters.

In order to provide a broader answer to the question of what role religious language could have in processes of religious dialogue and social work, I continue to use the example of gender equality, as in the argument laid out by Wallach Scott above, to problematise a view of religion as essentially intolerant. To avoid a gaze that is too Westernised, let me begin with an example of female emancipation in Islamic religious movements. In Saba Mahmood's study of the Da´wa movement in Egypt, she

shows how that movement effectively challenges patriarchal structures through engagement in theological matters. Western feminism is grounded in a specific understanding of freedom (as discussed in the previous chapter), most notably, freedom as autonomy; a kind of negative freedom that is realised by severing the ties to the collective and to social norms. Mahmood, however, is able to show how the mosque movement in Egypt effectively problematises this understanding of agency by showing how some practices, often construed as female subordination through Western eyes, in fact constitute a form of agency. She uses the example of the practice of a specific form of pious shyness (*al-haya*), a gendered form of shyness pertaining specifically to women that is cultivated by participants in the movement. *Al-haya* may reasonably be considered an act of submission. But Mahmood argues against this by saying that rather than being mere submission, practising *al-haya* is a conscious choice; it means 'making oneself shy, even if it means creating it'.[513] On this reasoning, *al-haya* is a form of agency, a way to cultivate and instigate behaviours.

What is interesting about this is that practising gendered forms of piety often means going against male authority, which has both a customary and divine meaning in Egypt. That is, by consciously cultivating this form of gendered piousness, what may appear to be submission is actually a challenge to patriarchal structures in which women are largely excluded from religious life. This is true of the entire Da´wa movement of course, which is comprised of female mosque classes, an otherwise uncommon Islamic practice in Egypt. Some aspects of piousness, despite being gendered, thus constitute forms of female agency and freedom. I shall not dig into the theoretical implications of Mahmood's reasoning, which are far-reaching. It is enough here to say that the Da´wa movement represents a *theologically motivated* feminism, a striving for gender equality that does not go against theological doctrines. On the contrary, it is realised by it. The Da´wa movement produces a form of gender equality by being attentive and true to the theological corpus. To put it bluntly, women in the mosque movement realise gender equality not by being less religious, but by being more so. Using this reasoning, religion seems to have been vital for challenging patriarchal structures.

Religion also played a vital, albeit often forgotten, part in the struggle for gender equality in the West. Much of the activism that paved the way for women's right to vote was driven by religious actors, and churches 'fostered' or 'cultivated' many of the most prominent activists for female emancipation. Arne Rasmusson states that 'Although I have known this for decades, I took for granted that [religious activists]

[513] Saba Mahmood, *The Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), 156.

played only a minor role in the broader women's movement'. However, 'it didn't take more than five minutes of research to discover that those who are depicted as pioneers in the American women's movement all had a [nonconformist religious] background.'[514] Religion was very much in the driver's seat within the women's emancipation movement during much of twentieth-century activism. In Sweden, too, the processes that led to the right to vote for women in 1919 were often driven by religious women. Inger Hammar shows how the theological and religious elements of feminist activists tend to be downplayed or overlooked completely, despite the fact that many of the activists in the women's emancipation movement in Sweden were driven by a theological calling.[515] Theology for these female activists was not merely a minor element and cannot be explained simply by the fact that 'those were religious times'. Rasmusson notes that secularism and atheism were not uncommon in the period. Theology was thus not merely an element of cultural conformity for these activists but a core motivation in their political engagement.[516] In a Swedish context, the most well-known of these women are Elin Wägner and Fredrika Bremer.

That these links between religious engagement, activism and emancipation are also a salient constituent in the history of social work as a discipline, despite being downplayed in social work research, which is often driven by a classic secularisation narrative (from religious conservatism to progressive secularism).[517] Against this narrative, Anna-Karin Kollind has suggested that women's work with female emancipation was at the heart of the process of professionalisation of social work in Sweden. In an article about three women, Emilia Fogelklou, Kerstin Hesselgren and Herta Svensson, Kollind shows that all of them were involved in the professionalisation of social work in Sweden, and that professionalism was not exclusively achieved through investigations of poverty[518] but equally by work towards female emancipation. More importantly for the argument here, their work was often theologically motivated.[519] Emilia Fogelklou is of particular salience in this regard. Although principally famous for her literary work, she was a Quaker and is famous for being the

[514] Arne Rasmusson, 'Kyrkan och kampen för ett bättre samhälle: En alternativ historia,' *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift* 2 (2020): 182, my translation.
[515] Inger Hammar, *Emancipation och religion: den svenska kvinnorörelsens pionjärer i debatt om kvinnans kallelse 1860-1900* (Lund: University, 1999).
[516] Rasmusson, 'Kyrkan och kampen för ett bättre samhälle,' 185.
[517] Ram Cnaan, Robert Wineburg and Stephanie Boddie, *The Newer Deal: Social Work and Religion in Partnership* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); James R. Vanderwoerd, 'Reconsidering Secularization and Recovering Christianity in Social Work History,' *Social Work & Christianity* 38, no. 3 (2011): 244–66.
[518] See Hans Swärd, 'De stora kartläggarna och hemlöshetsfrågan,' *Socialvetenskaplig Tidskrift* 10, no. 2–3 (2003): 151–71, https://doi.org/10.3384/SVT.2003.10.2-3.2656.
[519] Anna-Karin Kollind, 'Kvinnor och socialt arbete – vid övergången från filantropi till profession,' *Socialvetenskaplig Tidskrift* 10, no. 2–3 (2003): 172–92, https://doi.org/10.3384/SVT.2003.10.2-3.2660.

first female to obtain a theology degree in Sweden. What is of relevance to social work is that she also started the first marriage counselling clinic in Sweden, which became something of a yardstick for the subsequent professionalisation of social work.[520] Although seldom recognised as such, her work was pioneering for social work. Additionally, her work and her thought are permeated by theology, and much of her activism and her engagements in building a new society (of which her social work was an important part) were guided by (Quaker) theology. Let me illustrate how she combines theology with an emancipatory vision for women:

> The new female consciousness has its roots and strength in a *religious consciousness* that it is the living God of history that calls us to new work. The personal and civic value of women has in reality cut off the roots of its own being if it cannot see how, through long centuries, it has been carried forward by the Christian conviction of every creature's infinite value.[521]

In the quotation, Fogelklou expresses her deep concern for the female perspective, which she sees as indispensable for building new and better societies. Because women have historically been excluded from the realm of politics, women have the potential to see nuances and bring in ideas to the political that men, set in their ways as they are, cannot. This is what constitutes women's calling; when constructing new societies, the female perspective is indispensable. More so, female emancipation for Fogelklou is motivated theologically through a view of women as having a more direct relation to God than men. Through her example, we can see how a religious calling can be crucial for political activism; for Fogelklou, a religious calling is equally a feminist calling. In other words, theology is not marginal to her activism but is at its core.

These examples suggest that there seems to be a potential in theological and religious language for challenging gender inequalities. For Fogelklou, religious language played an important role in the emancipation of women. By drawing on a discourse of a religious calling, one that pertained particularly to women, she developed a theological argument for female emancipation. From what has been said previously, translating Fogelklou's claim into a religiously neutral argument for female emancipation á la Habermas would likely dilute its vigour and radicality, and its ability to speak to a specific group of people. This is a good example of why one needs to be attentive not merely to the content of an argument, as Habermas is, but equally to its

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[520] Anna-Karin Kollind, *Äktenskap, konflikter och rådgivning: Från medling till samtalsterapi* (Stockholm: Carson, 2002), Chapter 3.

[521] Fogelklou cited in Cecilia Johnselius Theodoru, 'Så ock på Jorden': Emilia Fogelklous gudsrikestanke – en feministisk utopi (Stockholm: Avdelningen för idéhistoria, Stockholm University, 2000), 61, my translation.

form. Rhetoric is not limited to rational argumentation by which the 'best' argument wins the day. Some forms of argumentation, some rhetorical gestures, speak to a particular group, whereas other do not. Fogelklou's argument cannot simply be translated into a universalistic argument because the idea of a religious calling comes with certain connotations, it resonates in a community in a specific way that goes beyond the rational core of the argument itself. My position is thus: If there is a critical, emancipatory potential in religion, as I have shown in this chapter, why not mobilise this potential when working to promote certain values?

In practical terms, this could mean that when working with gender equality with Muslims in a particular area, one could invite a feminist Muslim to speak and not merely a secular civil servant who speaks about Western values and integration. Or one could invite an imam to a discussion of Western democracy and its history of realising gender equality to discuss whether certain verses in the Quran can be read in a feminist or gender-equal way.

Putting Religion Back into Religious Dialogue

The question posed in this chapter is: How can religious dialogue, religious citizens and religious actors be integrated into, worked with, and contribute to, welfare social work? In trying to provide a tentative answer to this question, I investigated the theories of Habermas related to his concept of *reciprocal translation*. According to Habermas, productive encounters between citizens hinge on a process of translation by which particular language is translated into universally acceptable claims.

What Habermas overlooks in this regard is the meaning that language plays in identity construction. Language is not merely a means of communication and reciprocal exchange. In translation, something valuable is lost, something that links citizens to their specific lifeworld. In other words, there are reasons to suspect that the translation advocated by Habermas is not possible. Is there not, as Benjamin says,[522] something untranslatable in language, something specific to a group, a culture or a religious tradition that would get lost in translation? Is language not an essential part of the lifeworld? Let me return to the example given by Habermas: can the Christian doctrine of *imago dei* really be translated into a secular notion of human rights without losing something in the process? As we could see historically, although Christianity was crucial to the emergence of human rights discourse, it took a very specific sacralisation of personhood to institutionalise human rights.[523] Moreover, human rights form

[522] Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator', in *One-Way Street and Other Historical Writings*, 29–45.
[523] See Joas, *The Sacredness of the Person.*

a very peculiar discourse by formulating the value of human life and prosperity strictly in terms of *juridical* rights, quite different from the way human value is understood within a Christian conception of *imago dei*. What is of relevance to social work is that, if religion is a horizon of meaning as suggested in this dissertation, then attempts to translate religious language into neutral terms may motivate practices of drastically altering a client's worldviews or tearing them out of their lifeworld, a project that is unlikely to be very productive and fruitful. The main pragmatic reason for including religious language in dialogue forums and projects is because such language can more productively achieve change and meaningful encounters between various actors.

I further investigated the role that religious language could play in post-secular social work by identifying a few assumptions and preconceptions about religion in the interview material. Some interviewees associated religion with intolerance, gendered oppression, and indiscriminate violence. Such views reflect broader discourses on religion in Western societies.[524] However, insights gained from an investigation of literature on theological and philosophical history suggest that the intimate relation between intolerance and religion may be placed in a parenthesis of sorts. The line of reasoning by which religion came to be seen as anathema to progress and democratic values emerged against the background of power struggles and the emergence of state-based governance in the West. The rhetorical or discursive association of forms of violence and intolerance with religion served to justify the radical privatisation of the religious. Yet when it comes to gendered inequalities, secularism even seems to have been a driving factor, not an antidote to gendered inequalities.

In investigating the role religious actors played in women's rights movements, we can identify a critical and emancipatory potential in language, one that cannot simply be translated into universally acceptable claims. The emancipatory work was intimately linked to theology and faith, meaning that the religious element was essential for the work itself. The conclusion I draw is that mobilising religious language instead of translating it into neutral terminology as Habermas suggests, would utilise the potential for change in religion. In other words, critique should be formulated from *within* the lifeworld itself. If religious practices are constantly reinterpreted, and if religious language was vital in the establishment of women's rights in the West, then religion itself holds a possibility for constructive social work in relation to religious citizens. In other words, rather than reformulating religious language in neutral/secular terms, religious language can be mobilised in accordance with the goals and aspirations of social work.

[524] Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*; Farris, *In the Name of Women's Rights*.

7. SOCIAL WORK BEYOND SECULARISM

In this final chapter, I draw out the main conclusions from the investigations in this dissertation and try to say something more specific about how welfare social work could relate to religion as an object of thought and intervention. After having investigated work to prevent extremism and promote democracy and reflected upon how social work more broadly could operate in regard to religion in a fruitful manner, I have taken the position that social work would do well to work with a different conception of religion. The assumptions and preconceptions about religion that I have analysed in the interview material can be linked thematically and theoretically to secularist conceptions of religion. The argument against secularist views is that they reduce and oversimplify religion, rather than attempting to understand the religious in its full complexity. A phenomenological vision of the religious can better cater to the needs of social work as it is able to identify dynamic relations between aspects of the religious such as doctrines and teachings, inner faith and emotions, freedom, and religious language.

Before working out an alternative to secularism in social work, it is in order to briefly return to the discussion in chapter 1 about what constitutes a secularistic theory of religion. Secularist theories often treat religion as something essentially private and emotional, rooted in inner inclinations that only occasionally result in manifest procedures such as liturgy or social organisation. This view of religion is often accompanied by a reduction of the complexity of religious life to a neat and analysable system or set of doctrines, so further depriving the religious of practical, political, and economic relevance. Secularist interpretations thus tend to oscillate between two positions: either the religious is identified exclusively with propositions, official statements and verbalisable content, or else solely with subjective experience. Both

these positions and interpretations justify how the religious sphere becomes understood as structured by its own logic, as Weber famously described.[525]

The reduction of the religious to a system of symbolic practice or a system of propositions further underwrites a secularist expelling of the religious from the public arena. This move is often motivated by a view of religion as antithetical to the values of liberalism (democracy, tolerance and equality) and as particularly prone to lapsing into excessive violence. The main argument against religion in the private sphere, according to a secularist slant, is that religion holds and produces fervour that always risks becoming violent, misogynist, and intolerant. Secularism presents itself as the neutral broker, the innocent guardian of humanism that, although it may have its flaws, is never as intolerant, violent, or misogynist as religion. Secularism is self-gratulatory as it presents itself as the solution to the fervour, war and violence of which religion is the root cause. In order to contain perilous religious fervour, religion is placed outside the boundaries of the political arena.

The analysis of the interviews for this dissertation, suggests that the actors working to prevent extremism and promote democracy sometimes (unwittingly) draw on secularistic notions of religion in order to make sense of and intervene in the sphere of the religious. The question that has driven this dissertation has been: Should a secularist conception of the religious be incorporated into social work more broadly? Because of the limitations I find in secularist theories of religion, most clearly their inability to openly and curiously approach religion, the answer I give here is an emphatic no. But this does not mean that I argue against secularism as a political doctrine. This cannot be stressed enough. Secularism is a political doctrine like any other doctrine, and it may (and does) have its share of sympathisers in the world. But from the standpoint of social work, incorporating a secularist conception of religion for practical purposes is problematic because it is based on reducing complexity, on forcing religion into a rather narrow template, rather than fully grasping and engaging with it. Working with religion in social work must be utterly pragmatic; the task is to solve and mitigate social problems, regardless of whether these are related to religion or to something else. Mitigating or preventing social problems always implies an understanding of these problems, otherwise one is searching in the dark. Having as its main theoretical lens a theory of religion that more than anything defuses religion's political potential is not a very constructive approach for social work.

We thus need an alternative to secularism, a more constructive and productive alternative for how religion can be conceptualised, made sense of, and be intervened in

[525] Max Weber, 'Religious Rejections of the World and Their Directions,' in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (London: Routledge, 1991), 323–59.

within social work. Before I elaborate on my alternative, however, I shall summarise the main practical implications of secularism in social work so that we are in a position to see the benefits of my alternative.

Confrontational Social Work

In this section I offer a few reflections and critical comments that have emerged and become relevant from the analysis conducted in this dissertation. The reflections provided here are meant to contribute something about how social work could work with religion as I discuss what it may mean to incorporate a secularistic notion of religion in social work, and the potential downsides of doing so.

The risk of incorporating a vision of the religious as a set of doctrines is that its emphasis on intellectualism and verbalisable aspects of the religious may lead to confrontational work in which the worldviews of the clients are questioned, disproved, debunked, and reformed. As we saw in chapter 3, much of the work to prevent extremism and promote democracy was informed by such a vision of the religious, which meant that doctrines and teachings of extremists were construed of as almost the *cause* of extremism. Martyrdom, suicide, and violence were all doctrinal issues discussed by practitioners. Teachings on martyrdom, for instance, were said to provide the rationale for suicide attacks. In a theological context where straightforward suicide would otherwise be proscribed, martyrdom provides an alternative or a way to circumvent the prohibition on suicide, according to one practitioner. Because they identified theological ideas and teachings as the principal justification of suicide attacks, practitioners devoted much attention and energy to trying to disprove these doctrines. These attacks on teachings constitute a rationale and a strategy for practitioners by which they contest and deconstruct theological/philosophical arguments thought to motivate an act. Their main argument is often that extremist teachings are sectarian or marginalised. The fact that they are marginalised means automatically that they are also false. Doctrines thus become the centre of attention for practitioners who, in their work to prevent extremism, attack and debunk these doctrines according to the logic that if they are disproved, the whole extremist disposition will begin to crumble and shatter.

Why is this vision of the religious a form of secularism, one may ask? As was shown in chapter 3 through genealogical analysis, there are resemblances to how practitioners reason in regard to religious teachings and how biblical criticism and scientific findings were thought to invalidate religious belief during the era of the

Enlightenment.[526] The Enlightenment ideals paved the way for a project of disproving religion through science, a vision that is far from merely a dusty relic. New atheists such as Richard Dawkins or Christopher Hitchens constantly refer to scientific proofs and findings in order to bring religion down, for instance by arguing that certain historical facts invalidate specific events in the Bible. Dawkins is particularly clear on this in his famous book *The God Delusion*, where he refutes biblical and religious ideas through modern science. Dawkins even states that exposing religious readers to modern science can have the effect of converting them into atheists.[527] New atheism has been quite popular in recent decades, which signals a renewed interest in the critique of religion that was formulated with particular salience and vigour during the Enlightenment. What matters for the argument here is that a specific way of reading scripture began to surface and become popular during the Enlightenment, based on modern science and underwritten by a univocal metaphysics that collapsed finite and infinite aspects of the world.[528] On this view, reading, scripture becomes analogous to reading a scientific treatise. One would read the Bible or the Quran in the same way one would read Copernicus' *On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres*: as a collection of alleged facts.

The reason I am reluctant to adopt such a vision of the religious in social work is that preconceptions of this kind may easily be translated into what I consider to be counterproductive attacks on the worldviews of the client. By so clearly identifying the religious with its intellectual or cognitive content, practitioners risk taking on the role of teaching their clients about proper doctrine. That is, by arguing against specific teachings, saying that these are incorrect and marginalised compared to canonised doctrine, social workers might assume the peculiar role of teaching religious citizens about their own faith. To have a social worker, who may be a religious illiterate in the eyes of the (pious) client, say that the client is incorrectly informed when it comes to interpretating scripture is potentially offensive and thus also counterproductive (as well as evidence of a misunderstanding regarding how doctrines really work). A constructive conversation should perhaps not be initiated by an attack on the worldview of the client, but should preferably begin with a more open discussion (by which I do not mean an acceptance of violence or intolerance).

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[526] See Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1974); Peter Harrison, *'Religion' and the Religions in the English Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Gavin Hyman, *A Short History of Atheism* (London/New York: I. B. Tauris, 2010).

[527] Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (London: Bantam, 2006), 28.

[528] John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006); Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century* (Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1986).

These arguments for a more liberal or canonised interpretation of religion may in some instances be directly counterproductive. Let me flesh out this argument somewhat. Olivier Roy has shown how radical Islam, more than anything else, offers a radical position. It is the radicality of it, the fact that it goes against the mainstream of Islam, that is so appealing to young people.[529] This is noticeable in the fact that many extremists are converts; they are not interested in Islam in general, but merely in a very radical form of it. A similar argument is made by Robert Pfaller, who says that some forms of extreme piousness and personal conviction are linked more closely to narcissism than to the object of belief.[530] Self-esteem, which is the primary benefit of intense and ascetic piousness according to Pfaller, is linked to exclusivity, at least an imaginary exclusivity. Translated into a theory of fundamentalism and extremism, it can be argued that the appeal of Islamic extremism lies exactly in its being extreme and thereby hostile to mainstream Islam. Seeing themselves as an exclusive flock of enlightened believers who have seen the truth, extremists' positions hinge upon the idea that their doctrines depart from canonised interpretation. Extremists are, in their own vision, underdogs. Thus any argument that their views are unorthodox – even misinterpretations – paradoxically confirms the superiority of the extreme position, in the views of the clients.

Following this train of thought, let me draw attention to another issue related to the problem of adopting a secularistic view of religion in social work more broadly, focusing on the issue of freedom (discussed in chapter 5). In the analysis of the interview material, some of the interviewees adopt an alternative secularist interpretation of the religious when they declare that the religious is fundamentally anti-authoritarian, insisting that it is not about rules but about personal experience. As innocent and open as these declarations may sound, if adopted whole-heartedly in social work there would be a risk that all religions might be measured using a highly Protestant yardstick. One problematic implication of operating with this concept of religion is that practitioners may try to liberate clients who do not consider themselves unfree.

Let us also learn the lesson from Western feminism, an example that could serve us well when trying to identify the risks of having a narrow conceptualisation of freedom. What is sometimes identified as Western feminism's inability to operate beyond a Westernised outlook, and its consequent blindness to agency in women who, from a Western feminist standpoint, would appear to be unfree, is closely related to the

[529] Olivier Roy, *Jihad och döden* [*Le Djihad et la mort*] trans. Johan Öberg (Göteborg: Bokförlaget Daidalos, 2016).
[530] Robert Pfaller, *On the Pleasure Principle in Culture: Illusions Without Owners*, trans. Lisa Rosenblatt, Charlotte Eckler and Camilla Nielsen (London: Verso, 2014).

point I try to make here. Saba Mahmood has suggested that the Western feminist debate has been coloured by a view of freedom that is principally negative, that is, freedom as the absence of restraints.[531] Judith Butler departs from this vision by seeing both oppressive and progressive acts as located within a discursive horizon, rather than locating critique as coming from outside the discourse or the framework of power. While this is an important revaluation of the previously dominant understanding of liberation, Butler nevertheless remains tied to a highly modern, liberal vision of freedom in the sense that 'agency' often further implies that 'norms are thrown into question or are subject to resignification', Mahmood says.[532] Mahmood partly departs from Butler's view by saying that instead of adopting a dualistic view of doing and undoing, we should also notice 'the variety of ways in which norms are lived and inhabited, aspired to, reached for, and consummated'.[533]

I do not wish to dig deeper into the critique of Butler that emerges in Mahmood's analysis or into the alternative view of freedom and agency endorsed by Mahmood. What I want to draw attention to is how a particular view of freedom has coloured Western feminism to such an extent that it cannot fully accommodate those forms of agency identified by Mahmood in the Egyptian female mosque movement. Attempts to instil piousness and a desire to fulfil religious demands are still a form of agency, not its antithesis. By not recognising nuances of this kind, the risk is that practitioners in their work with religious citizens will come to support and endorse specific religious behaviours that are seen as exemplary and favourable. When practitioners say that Ramadan has a personal meaning to the believer, they implicitly foreclose the possibility that Ramadan may have other meanings than personal, idiosyncratic ones. What may seem like the most open formulation (religion is what the individual believes), may be construed as quite the opposite. Inasmuch as celebrating Ramadan may be personally motivated, it may equally be a form of belonging. As Charles Taylor remarked concerning rituals, rituals are not necessarily conducted for the sake of the individual but for the safety of the community.[534] My point is that emphasising only personally motivated elements is to privilege some forms of religion at the expense of others. Put more drastically, a subjectivist interpretation of religion tends to

[531] Saba Mahmood, *The Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), 11.
[532] Mahmood, *The Politics of Piety*, 21.
[533] Mahmood, *The Politics of Piety*, 23.
[534] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Massachusetts/London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 42.

lend itself to a rationale of severing people from their communitarian roots and having them adopt a liberal and idiosyncratic disposition.[535]

The implication of a secularist/Westernised vision of religion is thus that it tends to identify only some forms or understandings of religion and, by implication, combat others. The same can be said about another secularistic notion of religion, the one that has to do with whether religion is inherently violent, misogynist and intolerant. By seeing religion as coherent and immutable to change, and also as inextricably linked to violence and intolerance, practitioners risk approaching their clients in a prejudicial manner. I identified tendencies to do so in the interview material. I have also discussed an interesting reflection from one of the interviewees, Anne, concerning the risk of having prejudicial views of religious citizens. According to Anne, operating with a set of glasses that a priori identify religion with intolerance may turn into a type of social work that entrenches these views by painting the client into a corner of sorts. What began as a parent's views or the views of the community are then internalised in the client. As such, a secularist notion may prove to be quite unproductive. Thus, as I have continuously argued, we need better and more productive approaches to religion.

My proposition is thus that a constructive conversation should not be initiated by an attack on the worldview of the client but, preferably, with a more open discussion (by which I do not mean an acceptance of violence or intolerance). It is not that the approach I am opting for is to let opinions or worldviews go undisputed, but productive encounters should be guided by aspirations to find constructive ways to talk about and find alternative ways to interpret and understand behaviours and religious ideas. Let me now, in the remainder of this chapter, ground this argument in a theoretical vision.

Religion as a Lifeworld

Throughout this dissertation, I have paved the way for a different and improved concept of religion compared to a secularist concept. As the investigation has shown, secularism may lead social workers into a cul-de-sac of sorts. Practitioners oscillate between seeing religion principally as doctrines, paving the way for an incessant disproving of those doctrines seen as perilous, or else seeing religion solely in terms of inner faith and emotions. If practitioners do this, they may come to privilege certain religious expressions at the expense of others. In order to identify religion as something that can encompass more than only its doctrinal, expressible forms or its inner emotions, it is proposed here that religion is better conceived of as a lifeworld, in the

[535] Cf. Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (London: Profile Books, 2008), 124.

phenomenological sense of the word. The term 'lifeworld' (*Lebenswelt*) derives from the father of phenomenology, the German philosopher Edmund Husserl. Let me begin more broadly, however, with a brief description of phenomenology, which is 'the study of human experience and of the way things present themselves to us in and through such experience',[536] and show how this can be translated into a theory of religion that fits the purposes of this dissertation.

Husserl was deeply troubled by the scientism of his age. He believed that although modern (natural) science has produced both interesting and useful knowledge about the world, it has also reduced the world solely to its parts such as atoms, molecules, and serotonin, if I may give a few examples of my own. By implication, science detaches itself from the meaningful world that it in fact derives, while simultaneously refuses to acknowledge. The scientific world becomes primary whereas the lived world, the one we experience in our everyday life, is seen as nothing but a simulacrum of the real and tangible world of science. That is to say, the 'real' world is no longer the one we experience but the one science tells us lies behind or under our lived experience, the (sometimes) invisible parts of the world. In contradistinction to a scientific reduction of the world, Husserl wants to develop a pure transcendental phenomenology '*not as a science of matters of fact, but as a science of essences*'.[537] For Husserl, a science of essences does not study correlations and causality in the manner that natural sciences do. Phenomenology, broadly speaking, is the study of how the world appears to us. It deserves, however, to be mentioned that Husserl is not against reductionism per se. The phenomenological method, or better yet, the phenomenological *attitude*, is itself a form of reduction. To reinstate the primacy of the lived world, Husserl wishes to invoke an *even more radical reduction* than that conducted within the natural sciences: he wishes to put a parenthesis around all our ideas about how the world works in order for pure phenomena to become available for philosophical reflection.

To become a phenomenologist, according to Husserl, is to forget all we think we know about how the world works and simply study how it appears to us, a process or technique called *epoché* or bracketing. Epoché is characterised by a suspension of our prejudices and assumptions about how the world works, although not in a Cartesian act of radical doubt and suspicion. Rather than reject assumptions, we develop a thinking and a perceiving that is liberated from these presuppositions. Husserl explains:

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[536] Robert Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 2.
[537] Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, Vol II, trans. F. Kersten (Hague/Boston/Lancaster: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1982), xx.

> *We do not give up the positing we effected, we do not in any respect alter our conviction* which remains in itself as it is as long as we do not introduce new judgement-motives: precisely this is what we do not do. Nevertheless the positing undergoes a modification: while it in itself remains what it is, *we*, *so to speak, 'put it out of action' we 'exclude it,' we 'parenthesize it'*.[538]

Husserl's approach does not mean negation, as for sophists, nor doubt, as for sceptics, but the exercise of phenomenological thinking that suspends factual and spatio-temporal conjecture.[539] This is the essence of a phenomenological attitude. When working out a purely phenomenological account, we must thus break out of our habitual thinking in order to freely be able to grasp and reflect upon the genuine philosophical problems of appearances and experience. This is a difficult task indeed, Husserl admits, but adds that 'nothing less is required' of us.[540]

Phenomenology is thus the study of human experience and how things give themselves to us. This is achieved by placing everything we know about the world in brackets. To understand what Husserl means, let me offer a concrete example: If a psychologist or a neuroscientist studies depression as a phenomenon, they study levels of serotonin in the brain, the links between childhood trauma and depression later in life, and the like. Scientists, in Husserl's view, tend to emphasise causality and explanations. When giving a phenomenological account of depression, by contrast, one would have to study how certain sentiments are experienced by clients and how these clients make sense of those sentiments. We are thus concerned principally with how actors make sense of and perceive the phenomenon, in this case depression. A philosophical analysis of depression would entail looking at it from a wide range of angles to see the many different shapes it takes. Phenomenology thus effectively shifts perspective from third person to first person.

Another important constituent of a phenomenological attitude is the realisation that consciousness is not an isolated thing. Husserl challenged the Cartesian conception of the *Cogito* with the argument that consciousness always has an object. The pure and empty *I think* in Descartes has forgotten that we always think *of* something. Our consciousness and our will always have a direction, an object, what Husserl calls *intentionality*. Although the term 'intentionality' may superficially seem like a rather fancy term for something quite trivial, it is actually quite controversial, at least within the context of modern philosophy. The concept of intentionality provides a way out of the egocentric predicament that has its roots in Cartesianism, by which 'all we can

[538] Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology*, 58–59.
[539] Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology*, 61.
[540] Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology*, xix.

be really sure of at the start is our own conscious existence and the state of that consciousness'.[541] On this understanding of it, consciousness is something like a bubble, and it is only by making inferences that we may become aware of the external world. The path from consciousness to the external world has been a tedious and difficult problem for modern philosophy to solve, and Husserl offers a solution.

For Husserl, the 'external' world is part of and makes up our consciousness, although this formulation too fails to account for what he means. A sharp distinction between outer and inner is exactly what he wishes to problematise. By drawing attention to how consciousness is always consciousness of something, Husserl grounds subjectivity in relation to the world and, importantly, to other consciousnesses. There is no movement from the inner to the outer, since there is no inner without an outer, as it were. Consciousness never exists in isolated form: our inner consciousness is always already external; it is always already *in the world*. His emphasis on intentionality has the further implication that human consciousness is ultimately intersubjective or public; there is no pure solitary mind to which we can retreat, since our consciousness at its most fundamental is related to the world in which we live. Our inner inclinations, our innermost thoughts and wishes, derive from the world. Phenomenology is thus directly antagonistic to solipsism.

Let me now return to the concept of lifeworld. The lifeworld needs to be understood against its opposite, which is the scientific world of idealised objects. In his book on the crisis of science, Husserl says that mathematics has constructed from the lifeworld 'an infinite totality of ideal objects which are determinable univocally, methodically and quite universally for everyone'.[542] As such, modern science portrays the world as secondary: 'What looks like a table is really a conglomeration of atoms, fields of force, and empty spaces'.[543] The point with phenomenology is not to dualistically contrast the world of science with the lifeworld, but on the contrary, to show how the objective world is not another world but the *same* world, albeit approached with new methods.

Unlike the scientific world, the lifeworld is given to us directly in a meaningful way. The German philosopher Martin Heidegger has further clarified that we have a pragmatic and practical attitude towards the things we encounter. If we enter a tool shed, we see an array of tools: a hammer, a few nails, a screwdriver and some boards. We encounter these objects not in a purely scientific way, but as objects that can *do things for us*. A door handle, for instance, is an object that can do something for us: it

[541] Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 9.
[542] Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Philosophy: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy, 1970), 32.
[543] Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 146.

can allow us to go outside or to lock someone out. The door handle is, to use Heidegger's terminology, *ready-at-hand* (*Zuhanden*). Various objects are linked to one another here, forming a whole rather than discrete objects of investigation. Only when the door handle is broken, when it can no longer help us achieve something, can we begin to contemplate its being in the way that a scientist would.[544] This means that we experience the world as a meaningful whole, where things are connected to each other, in what Husserl terms *the natural attitude*.

The natural attitude is thus first and foremost a *pragmatic* attitude by which we encounter the world as a world in which to intervene. This is how the world is experienced. We can never escape our meaningful existence. We are, as the French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty says, *condemned to meaning*.[545] We can never not experience the world. We have a certain belief in the world and its existence; we believe that things exist, that there are other consciousnesses just like mine, an *Urdoxa* of sorts that sustains our experiences of the world.[546] This point has been further developed by the German sociologist Alfred Schutz. For Schutz, the lifeworld is the public shared horizon of meaning. Actors are linked to one another and share a sense of understanding and time. For Schutz, it is not merely the phenomenological attitude that is characterised by epoché. The natural attitude, too, is sustained by a sort of bracketing, albeit of a slightly different variant. Whereas phenomenological bracketing places our assumptions about the world in parentheses, the epoché of the natural attitude suspends our doubt. Schutz says that 'as long as the once established scheme of reference, the system of our and other people's warranted experiences works, as long as the actions and operations performed under its guidance yield the desired results, we trust the experiences.'[547] The natural attitude is thus sustained by a belief in the world, a belief in its existence, and in some sense its meaning.

From phenomenology, we can extract the idea that the lifeworld is a background from which our experiences take their form. It is our horizon from within which we engage in and experience the world. Perception, tactile experience, and other ways for us to become familiar with our environment, even our ability to scientifically study the world, are shaped from within this horizon. Schutz and Luckmann phrase it well

[544] Martin Heidegger, *Vara och Tid* [*Zein und Zeit*], trans. Jim Jakobsson (Göteborg: Bokförlaget Daidalos, 2013), 86.
[545] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge/Kegan Paul, 1989, 1962), xix.
[546] Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 45.
[547] Alfred Schutz, *Collected papers 1: The Problem of Social Reality* (Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1962), 228.

when they state that the lifeworld, 'understood in all its totality as natural and social world, is the arena, as well as what sets the limits, of my and our reciprocal action'.[548]

So, what has all this got to do with religion? Schutz proposes that religion is an aspect of the lifeworld, its own *finite province of meaning* within the lifeworld, as he calls it. Within the one lifeworld, there are a plethora of provinces of meaning, according to Schutz, and we constantly shift between these, which is to say, we shift our attention and take a 'Kierkegaardian leap' between these various provinces of meaning.[549] As I read Schutz, this is not an argument for differentiation (despite being heavily influenced by Weber) as much as a way to explain how our attention and our goals fundamentally shape our experience of reality. Regardless, I am less concerned about the nature of different provinces of meaning than is Schutz. The point I wish to make here is that religion is part of the lifeworld in the sense that it is part of an already given horizon of meaning.

Returning to Lindbeck and his argument for a cultural-linguistic theory of religion, one can note a homology between a phenomenological vision and Lindbeck's post-liberal theology. According to Lindbeck, religion 'is not a power, something to which social events, behaviours, institutions or processes can be causally attributed; it is a context, something within which they can be intelligibly – that is, thickly – described'.[550] Despite being sociological rather than transcendental,[551] is not Lindbeck's argument quite similar to how a lifeworld is described by Husserl, and by Schutz? In other words, is not the transcendental lifeworld socially given? Religion for Lindbeck is a horizon of meaning, a context or a background from which experience can emerge. Rather than being reduced to either its doctrines or to inner inclinations, religion gives meaning to social behaviour. If we accept the phenomenological account of the individual as situated in a context, *in medias res* as it were, we can understand religion not exclusively as something contemplated and reflected on, as doctrines to which the individual believer assents, but as a specific form of perception, an attitude towards the world. I do not by this mean that religion is never reflected or part of individual preferences, but rather that individual preference is not necessarily part of the *essence* of religion.

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[548] Alfred Schutz and Thomas Luckmann, *The Structures of the Lifeworld*, trans. Richard M. Zaner and H. Tristram Engelhardt Jr. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 6.

[549] Schutz, *Collected papers 1*, 232.

[550] Geerz cited in Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 115.

[551] According to Sigurdson, the main difference between a phenomenological account and Lindbeck's is that phenomenology considers the lifeworld to be transcendental. However, as Sigurdson in my opinion correctly points out, the tradition from Schutz goes in this direction as well, as it gives a sociological rather than a transcendental/philosophical account of the lifeworld. See Ola Sigurdson, *Heavenly Bodies: Incarnation, the Gaze, and Embodiment in Christian Theology*, trans. Carl Olsen (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2016), 31. See also Schutz, *Collected papers 1.*

The main argument in this section is that religion in a phenomenological sense construes the relation between inner desire and external manifestation by placing religion within an already meaningful world. There is no opposition between doctrinal and preferential aspects of religion. Or, to say the same thing, religion always supersedes the individual, and hence also predates individual choice by being a horizon from which experience emerges in the first place. This does not, however, mean that religion is a static and inflexible system of doctrines. I shall elaborate on this point in the next section.

Lifeworld and Immanent Critique

What use do we have for phenomenology in the social work matters discussed in this thesis? I propose that the tensions in working with religious citizens, as identified in earlier chapters, can be resolved through a phenomenological vision of religion. At its most general, social work needs to be able to deal with problematic and undesirable views and behaviours related to religion, for issues like honour violence, extremist violence and the like cannot simply be brushed aside. Social work must maintain a critical approach to these issues. And yet confrontations and triumphalist arguments for Western values are likely to entrench or fuel rather than alter these behaviours. The issue to be grappled with is thus: how are we to maintain a critical and problematising approach to these issues without confrontations?

The answer, I believe, lies in seeing religion as a lifeworld. A phenomenological vision enables a critical approach to specific religious traditions without the need for ontologisation. Religion is not primarily a static system of rules or propositions; rather, it is a horizon of meaning that shapes and is shaped by the broader context, a context that is utterly pragmatic, social, cultural, and linguistic, rather than exclusively spiritual or intellectual. The fact that we are condemned to meaning does not mean that we are caught in a rigid worldview, and that reflection and critique are impossible or impotent. In hermeneutic phenomenology such as Ricœur's, one may instead speak of a distance between the interpreter and the interpreted, one by which the 'possibility of both a critical and a self-critical posture is given in the gap between these two horizons'.[552] This further implies that change, reinterpretation and difference are inscribed into the very essence of religion. Religion gives meaning to events, narratives, and behaviours, albeit never in any final or fixed way. The horizon of meaning is just that; a horizon that is constantly changing when the position of the observer changes.

[552] Sigurdson, *Heavenly Bodies*, 26.

The practical implication of this view of the religious is that critique and progression does not need to come from the outside, as formulated in the language of another discursive formation. Critique has less of an antagonistic relation when formed in the in-between of various disparate discourses. Critique is perhaps better understood as contained within the concept itself (as Hegel would say[553]). If difference and alterity are of the essence of the religious, then critique may very well be formulated from within, in the language of the believers themselves. The insight that a religious position may itself hold a possibility for change and progression results in a slightly different approach to the religious in social work.

To make this claim, let me briefly go through the four themes of this dissertation to say something about how they relate to phenomenology. Beginning with the issue of doctrines, a phenomenological viewpoint allows us to emphasise how a specific doctrine is formulated in a context. That is to say, rather than reducing the religious to intellectualism, doctrines can be conceived of as theoretical reflections on the lived world, a world that is utterly pragmatic. This is a different conception of doctrines and teachings than seeing them as free-floating ideas that any individual believer may merely 'pluck from the sky', as it were. According to Husserl, theoretical reflections are formulated from within the lifeworld, but they are not detached from it. Theology, in the form of critical reflections on the religious lifeworld, is thus always pragmatic and related to the problems and the daily practices of this world. As Sigurdson says: '[M]eaning is irreducibly intertextual, and not even the historical church shaped its theology independently of the challenges entailed by its own period.'[554] In the early (Christian) church, doctrine was linked to practice that aimed to cultivate moral ways of life, ways to live as a Christian.[555] Soteriology (reflections on how to overcome sin and retain salvation) and ontology are intrinsically linked, at least in Christianity.

If we consider theology and idealised reflections as intrinsically linked to the lived world, then it is easy to see how attempts to prevent extremism by trying to change or even disprove religious teachings are likely to be unsuccessful. When trying to make sense of the views of clients, the emphasis should be on how a religious idea corresponds to and gives meaning to events, practices, and structural conditions. The emphasis in a constructive work should be on reformulating and cultivating some interpretations of this lived world, not in providing a drastic alternative to it. The same

[553] For a detailed description of Hegel's vision of the concept as entailing both the thesis and the antithesis, if one may use those words (Hegel did not), see Todd McGowan, *Emancipation After Hegel: Achieving a Contradictory Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019).
[554] Sigurdson, *Heavenly Bodies*, 33.
[555] Sigurdson, *Heavenly Bodies*, 40.

rule of thumb applies to the issue of inner beliefs and emotions. From a phenomenological point of view, even the most radically individual belief is itself always already social, already shaped and formed in a lifeworld, and within and linked to a community of believers like a church or congregation. Religious experience always transcends the individual and is communitarian, public and practical in scope. Or, to use the terminology of Husserl, does not the most radically individual faith derive from intersubjectivity?

The problem of dichotomisation, by which religious faith either becomes subjective, as it is for the Romantics and for many of the interviewees in this study, or else is entirely objective, as it is for Žižek and Pfaller, can be resolved through the framework of phenomenology. If we conceive of the world as a meaningful whole from which our experiences arise, a world that is already cultural, already historical in ways that precede the individual, then inner tendencies and inclinations are neither purely individual nor do they predate our actions in the world. Our inclinations are shaped within a social and cultural world so that certain positions, certain emotions and desires become available to us whereas others do not. Praying, for example, is not a purely subjective act, a realisation of inner faith, but equally a participation in the *tradition* of prayer.[556] The act of praying transcends the isolated event and, in some sense, the idiosyncratic tendencies of the individual, and thereby links the individual believer to the community and to tradition. It is within a specific context that the act of praying becomes meaningful and desirable, which means that even the most isolated and solipsistic form of faith is simultaneously a public and historical act. Belief constitutes a particular mode of life. On the topic of prayer, Sigurdson says, 'the rule of prayer does not only affect what one believes, but the norm of faith also sets boundaries for how one may pray.'[557] A phenomenological view of religion puts a finger exactly on this reciprocity.

The practical implications of this view can be related to the argument made in chapter 4, where it was demonstrated that work to prevent extremism often means trying to substitute democratic convictions for extremist convictions. Targeting inner convictions may seem like a productive way to prevent radicalisation, but from a phenomenological point of view, what needs to be altered or critically discussed is not merely the inner devotion but the entire context in which fundamentalism/jihadism/extremism becomes meaningful in the first place. What needs to be

[556] Ola Sigurdson, 'Prayer, Subjectivity and Politics,' in *Phenomenology and Religion: New Frontiers*, ed. Jonna Bornemark and Hans Ruin (Huddinge: Södertörn University, 2010), 280.
[557] Sigurdson, *Heavenly Bodies*, 39.

grappled with is: How is an extremist worldview justified and what practical and social processes are becoming meaningful within an extreme worldview? Which social constellations seem to harmonise with extreme worldviews? This approach does not mean reducing the one to the other, as if saying that religious extremism is really is about politics or exclusion; rather it is seeing how certain fundamentalist ideas and convictions can help the believer to make sense of experiences like marginalisation, exclusion, poverty and political topics. The emphasis on sense-making makes all the difference here, since we can never know a priori exactly how the political and the social are linked to religious ideas and inner convictions. In other words, there may be alternative ways to interpret events and conditions within that very lifeworld, since meaning here is never fixed, but is always situational.

From a phenomenological point of view, social work should be less engaged in providing alternatives to a specific lifeworld and more attentive to the flexibility and potential for transformation that is immanent to the lifeworld itself. That, according to my reasoning, would be a productive way to engage in religious discourse. In the last two chapters of the analysis, chapters 5 and 6, I argued that religion contains potential for change within itself. In chapter 5, this idea was approached through the issue of rule-following, where I discussed freedom and how rule-following is linked to contingency. The argument was that applications of a rule always entail a moment of potential disruption. This argument was made with the help of the French philosopher Félix Ravaisson, whose philosophy harmonises quite well with how freedom has been conceived of in phenomenology.[558]

The impact of Ravaisson's philosophy is perhaps most obvious in a later French phenomenologist, Paul Ricœur. Ricœur offers a phenomenological account of the will and the body, formulating these as inseparable parts of Husserlian intentionality. By separating reflexes from what Ricœur calls *preformed skills*, he is able to show how the voluntary and the involuntary are related, in a manner not totally different from Ravaisson in his philosophy of habit. Ricœur draws attention to these preformed skills by stating that 'prior to all learning, all knowledge of the body, we possess a primitive pattern of behaviour of our body in relation to perceived objects.'[559] In polemic with behaviourism and scientific psychology, Ricœur proposes that our basic modes of life,

[558] Ravaisson's philosophy has been important for the later phenomenological tradition. Henri Bergson, a French philosopher and Ravaisson's student, played an immense role in Schutz's philosophy, particularly as regards his view on attention within the lifeworld (attention is a major theme in the French spiritualist tradition). There are also many similarities between Edmund Husserl's phenomenology and the tradition of French spiritualism from which Ravaisson stems (which includes Victor Cousin and Maine de Biran). However, Husserl is arguably less overtly mystical in tone. For Schutz's use of Bergson, see Schutz, *Collected Papers*. For a more general discussion on the relations between phenomenology and French spiritualism, see Simone Kotva, *Effort and Grace: On the Spiritual Exercise of Philosophy* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020).

[559] Paul Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, trans. Erazim V. Kohák (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University, 2007), 232.

such as our inclination at an early age to tilt our heads to see an object better or to reach out our hand to touch an object, are not mechanistic but more complex, more related to our disposition than mere reflexes are. These are part of our constitution as practical beings. Ricœur says that 'as soon as the world presents itself to me, I know how to do something with my body, without knowing either my body or the world.'[560] Preformed skills are thus a way for us to make sense of our world in which our bodily disposition allow us to grasp, perceive and experience the world in certain ways. These preformed skills can be honed, cultivated, mobilised, and used in accordance with our will. Habits are a way to cultivate and mobilise our inclinations to produce and shape skills. When it comes to the issue of freedom, habits, as for Ravaisson, are a form of activity. Habit does not cause our actions; it is a specific form of action. For Ricœur, just like for Ravaisson, habit and freedom are not each other opposites. Habit is constitutive of freedom; it is its condition. Habit is the '"organ of willing".'[561]

It can thus be argued that habits, like tradition, hold a potential for transformation. If one were to assume, as phenomenologists do, that we find ourselves in an already meaningful world, then there is no disengaged will that neutrally decides. The will is already engaged, it always has a direction.[562] To speak in phenomenological terms, we are condemned to meaning and can never be fully disengaged. This, however, does not mean mindless repetition or the absence of freedom, since the lifeworld itself is constituted by horizons that never entirely overlap, which leaves room for reinterpretation. Ricœur thus suggests that the lifeworld itself always contains an element of transformation. Hence, even the most rigorous rule-following holds a potential for transformation.[563]

In finding a constructive way to work with religious citizens, acknowledgement of this element of transformation allows social workers to operate within a specific worldview in order to inspire change and improvement. That is to say, one does not need to find an alternative worldview (e.g. a secular/liberal or democratic one) as much as to initiate change from within the lifeworld itself. This argument becomes even clearer when linked to language and the issue of whether religion harmonises with certain goals of social work and moral discourse in liberal democracies, as discussed in chapter 6. For instance, is religion incompatible with gender equality? This

[560] Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, 233.
[561] Jakub Čapek, 'Habit and Freedom in Merleau-Ponty and Ricœur,' *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 31, no. 3 (2017): 437, https://doi.org/10.5325/jspecphil.31.3.0432.
[562] Cf. Martin Luther, 'On Bondage of the Will', in Ernst F. Winter ed., *Discourse on Free Will: Desiderius Erasmus and Martin Luther* (London/New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 101–142.
[563] Cf. Virno's discussion on jokes as possible transformative moments. See Paolo Virno, *Multitude: Between Innovation and Negation*, trans. Isabella Bertoletti, James Cascaito and Andrea Casson (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2008), 67–168.

question served as a basis for a discussion on whether religious language should be maintained within post-secular forums in social work. What would a phenomenologist have to say about that? I find a relevant discussion in Swedish theologian Jayne Svenungsson's work on religious tradition and transformation, as conceived of within the framework of phenomenology. When giving a phenomenological account of religious tradition, she draws attention to the alterability of a religious lifeworld. Tradition, for Svenungsson, is something to which believers respond rather than slavishly follow.

Svenungsson begins with the example of same-sex marriage, an issue that divided the Christian and public debate at the time of her writing (at least in Sweden). The argument for extending the term 'marriage' to same-sex couples was often condemned by appealing to tradition, with the argument that such a move was against tradition. 'Behind this refutation', Svenungsson says 'lies, of course, the conviction that there is such a thing as a tradition that speaks with a univocal and timeless voice'.[564] This view of religion is held both by traditionalists within religion as well as by critics of religion, such as the so-called New Atheists who 'convey an image of religious traditions as static and hopelessly archaic'.[565] Against this view, which regards any 'liberal' version of a religious tradition as insincere and refers back to the 'original' and violent formulation, Svenungsson suggests that the ancient formulation is, in fact, not ancient at all, but modern. By taking a closer look at history we will find, she says, that what are often depicted as ancient and timeless interpretations of scripture is in fact a product of the emerging biblicism in the seventeenth century.[566] The ancient view, on the contrary, was characterised by sensitivity to the complexity and multiplicity of meaning in religious texts. Returning to the issue of marriage, she says that one should not forget that in antiquity and the Middle Ages, 'the highest ideal of the Christian life was celibacy. Only with the Reformation was marriage elevated to a rank equal to, and henceforth regarded as an equal calling with, celibacy.'[567] To rely on the ideal of marriage between the sexes thus becomes problematic from this view, since it was not marriage at all but celibacy that was celebrated at certain points in history. That is, appealing to tradition is problematic, since tradition itself is contingent.

The implications of Svenungsson's argument dissolve the whole view of tradition as timeless. Even the most rigorous of doctrines are, in fact, situated. That is to say,

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[564] Jayne Svenungsson, 'Tradition and Transformation: Towards a Messianic Critique of Religion,' in *Phenomenology and Religion: New Frontiers*, ed. Jonna Bornemark and Hans Ruin (Huddinge: Södertörn University, 2010), 205.
[565] Svenungsson, 'Tradition and Transformation,' 206.
[566] Svenungsson, 'Tradition and Transformation,' 206.
[567] Svenungsson, 'Tradition and Transformation,' 207.

religious traditions are, by their very nature, dynamic and changing. As a way to provide a theological critique from the inside, which I believe can function as an inspiration for social work as regards religion, Svenungsson draws on the phenomenology of Emmanuel Levinas and his notion of the messianic. She finds in Levinas an approach to history and tradition that can account for multiple voices and alterity: 'A tradition, in other words, survives and thrives by continuously reinterpreting and renegotiating its limits through the tradition and transformation encounter with what is *other*.'[568] Tradition, in Svenungsson's view, is not something to be preserved as timeless truths. It is rather a promise, something to which we must continuously respond. Each moment calls for a new response and judging.

Svenungsson's insights show that phenomenology can allow for a constant renegotiation and reinterpretation of religious demands. To put it more broadly, to identify religious doctrines and ideas as emanating from within a particular lifeworld is also to identify the contextual and thus transformative nature of these religious doctrines. Any references to religion as in its essence misogynist or violent can be countered through a vision of religion as formed within specific cultural, social circumstances. Such a vision does not deny the many cases of religious intolerance, both in history and in the present, but it refuses to ontologise intolerance, making it a permanent feature of the phenomenon itself. Religion is always linked with the social, political, and cultural context in which it is formed. With this perception, it becomes possible to see how the religious played an immense role in the women's emancipation movements of the twentieth century,[569] since the potential links between women's emancipation and religion remained open. If we recognise the role of religion within these movements, we may very well consider the possibility that religious language could help cultivate certain values that a practitioner wants to realise within social work. Thus, as argued in chapter 6, religious language may indeed hold a potential for social work in the sense that it has a language for gender equality, pacifism, or human rights, as linked to the aims and purposes of social work.

As a final remark, the alternative I am proposing here is an argument against social workers formulating critique from outside a particular meaning construction, for example, by claiming that certain behaviours have no support in the Quran, setting humanistic/secular values of human rights in contrast to a religious worldview, or converting extremists into devout democrats. Instead, critique can be formulated from within. Let me offer a clarifying example from the interview material in this study,

[568] Svenungsson, 'Tradition and Transformation,' 220–221.
[569] Cf. Inger Hammar, *Emancipation och religion: den svenska kvinnorörelsens pionjärer i debatt om kvinnans kallelse 1860-1900* (Lund: Lunds Universitet, 1999).

which can serve to illustrate my point (although it should not be taken as a guideline of dos and don'ts).

One of the interviewees, Margarethe, says that many of those she met who are associated with radical Islam and extremism justify their violent jihad by claiming that it is a way to atone for previous sins. However, in her discussions with imams and other experts, she has become aware that jihad has a broader meaning, one that does not by definition mean violent jihad. There are many ways to do jihad in Islam, and far from all of them are violent. Jihad also means a spiritual quest against one's own sins. To do jihad can mean to do good deeds and to be pious, in contrast to killing one's enemies. This approach may seem similar to the ones I have commented on critically in this dissertation, but with an important difference. The difference is that when discussing various interpretations of jihad and practices of doing jihad, social work practitioners do not have to fall into a correct/incorrect argumentation in terms of which a violent jihad is a misinterpretation. Although jihad simply means striving towards God, jihad has had a militarised meaning from the beginning,[570] so there is no point in denying that connotation. In other words, the starting point is not to attack a worldview but to work within the language and the horizon of meaning of the clients when discussing various ways to relate to practices and ideas. This approach may spark or cultivate a self-critical movement that is already alive and present within these religions.

Another of the interviewees, Anne, says something interesting in regard to self-critique in religion, as I described in chapter 6. She knows from experience that religious adolescents are quite eager to problematise their own religion. But when attacked or when someone from the outside problematises it, they tend to become defensive and feel threatened and questioned. Change must, as Anne says, come from them, or in my opinion, from within the lifeworld in which citizens live, in order for the work to be fruitful. The main task of social work should be to support critical reflection, while always being careful not to force it on people (which does not mean allowing all kinds of intolerance or violence).

It is exactly this way of relating to the religious that I believe a phenomenological vision can accommodate and spur on. By operating with nuances and with many different interpretations (rather than claiming that there is only one correct interpretation), all of which still are *within* the horizon of meaning for the clients or the population, it becomes possible to offer clients (better) alternatives without pushing for a drastic reconceptualization of their whole worldview.

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[570] Roy, *Jihad och döden*, 24.

Potential for More Research

All that has been said above indicates the importance of knowing more about how religion is and can be approached constructively within the horizons of social work. I thus want to draw attention to a few areas for future investigation, areas that hold potential for contributions to the broader research community.

One of the most important insights I have gained in the process of writing this dissertation is that the very concept of religion has a history, a history that is inextricably linked to colonialism as well as being deeply engrained with Christian norms and presumptions. Most importantly, religion as a concept is defined and becomes meaningful only in relation to secularism. That is to say, the term 'religion', as a universal concept denoting a specific form of human sense-making, is formulated from within a specific worldview, and as such is only able to identify certain forms of religion. Anthropologist Brian Klug even says that the term 'religion' cannot be unequivocally applied to other cultures, in his case Judaism:

> It is partly on account of this problem that I hesitate to call Judaism a 'religion'. For, even to the extent that it makes sense to apply the word to Judaism, it does not necessarily make the same sense that it makes when it is applied to Christianity: the one 'religion' is organized around the notion of peoplehood, the other around the concept of a church. A similar complication arises with calling Judaism a 'faith'.[571]

The difference between Judaism and Christianity, at least initially when Christianity was in its formative period, was that whereas Christianity was a religion, Judaism refused to be one, as noted by the historian Daniel Boyarin.[572]

The same can be said about most religions. The risk in applying a concept of religion that is derived from a Christian vision of religion qua faith is that attempts to understand the religious may resort to triumphalism: all other religions may seem like distortions of religion or as underdeveloped compared to the one true faith of Christianity. I am not implying that social workers would intentionally accuse other traditions of being lower forms of religion, but the implicit meaning in the term would still likely privilege certain forms of religious behaviours at the expense of others, as I have showed in this dissertation.

Living as we do in a multicultural and post-secular world, in a setting where social workers need to work with, understand and encounter religions other than

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[571] Klug cited in Jayne Svenungsson, 'The return of religion or the end of religion? On the need to rethink religion as a category of social and political life,' *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 46, no. 7 (2020): 789, https://doi.org/10.1177/0191453719896384.

[572] Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 8.

Christianity, using an inextricably Western/Christian term such as 'religion' becomes problematic. But does this mean that we should give up the term? I do not think so (if we did, this whole investigation would have been pointless). Instead, I believe it will be fruitful to further investigate how religion is being conceptualised, as well as further reflect on more informative and more productive definitions and theories of religion. What I suggest is that, in addition to the studies already conducted in areas such as migration, honour, female circumcision, religious social work in civil society, interactions between faith-based organisations and welfare institutions and areas where religion is studied and discussed, we also need more reflective studies on how religion is conceptualised within these domains. In addition to studies on discourses on religion or whether a particular phenomenon is caused by or related to religion, there is a need for study of the very premises of approaching religion within these fields. Reflecting on the premises of religion entering the domain of social work is a matter of utmost importance both for the academic discipline and for practitioners. Reflective studies of that kind could further actualise interdisciplinary research, particularly interactions between the field of social work and theology, religious studies, sociology of religion, or even philosophy of religion. In the practical field, such interactions seem to be quite common, at least when it comes to work to prevent extremism where researchers in areas related to religion are involved in projects and in the work itself. Similar encounters could possibly also be fruitful within the academy.

In order to understand better the premises for religion entering social work, I would also like to call for more research on the history of social work, and particularly its relation to religious social work. As Vanderwoerd says, the history of social work has tended to be interpreted through the lenses of secularisation.[573] Religious elements in social work and its propagators have been downplayed, implicitly seen as superseded by secular agendas and ideals. But there are reasons to suspect that religion and religious ideas were, in fact, vital to the emergence of professional social work. In Sweden, some important actors at the beginning of professional social work were undoubtedly theologically motivated. Emilia Fogelklou has already been mentioned. We can add preacher and theologian Natanael Beskow and writer Ebba Pauli who, with influences from the settlement movement in England, started the so-called Birkagården, an important stepping-stone in the emergence of professional social work. Gerda Meyersson also deserves to be mentioned, for she was one of the initiators of the CSA (Centralförbundet för Socialt Arbete), an organisation lobbying for

[573] James R. Vanderwoerd, 'Reconsidering Secularization and Recovering Christianity in Social Work History,' *Social Work & Christianity* 38, no. 3 (2011): 244–66.

organised social work (Pauli was also a prominent member of the group). All of these operated from a Christian faith that was by no means marginal to their engagement.[574]

I believe that this history could beneficially be studied from the perspective of post-secularism in order to genuinely begin to grasp the role religion, and perhaps specifically Christianity, has played in the emergence of social work in Sweden. Such studies can contribute significantly to social work and its own self-understanding, and may prove to be vital if we are to grasp the premises for understanding and working with religion in social work.

[574] Meyersson's work with the religious organisation *Vita Bandet* is an example of how religious social work was closely affiliated with emerging professional social work. See Åsa Bengtsson, *Nyktra kvinnor: folkbildare, företagare, och politiska aktörer: Vita Bandet 1900-1930* (Göteborg: Makadam, 2011).

8. SVENSK SAMMANFATTNING

Socialt arbete har de senaste åren kommit att arbeta med religion som fenomen. Inom delar av det sociala arbetet tog diskussionen om islamistisk radikalisering fart efter 9/11 och intensifierades ytterligare av att svenska medborgare under åren som följde valde att ansluta sig till terrororganisationen Islamiska Staten. Det arbete mot extremism som följde satte religion på det sociala arbetets karta. Förebyggande och långsiktigt arbete har utpekats som särskilt gynnsamt för att motverka extremism. I policy har socialarbetare framhållits som lämpliga aktörer för att driva och genomföra detta långsiktiga arbete, tillsammans med bland annat lärare och fritidsledare. Extremism är dock inte det enda fenomen som religion har fått ökad synlighet inom socialt arbete. Socialarbetare arbetar idag kontinuerligt med frågor kring att motverka kvinnlig omskärelse, hedersrelaterat våld, de arbetar med frågor kring migration och integration, familjeverksamhet, samtliga områden där religion diskuteras.

Hur ska vi egentligen förstå detta förnyade intresse för religionen inom socialt arbete? Det kan konstateras att socialt arbete inte befinner sig i ett vakuum. Den liberala gränsdragningen mellan politik och religion, eller offentlig och privat för den delen, har kommit att utmanas och gränserna har ritats om i sekulära samhällen. Det går att tala om ett *postsekulärt* tillstånd, ett tillstånd där religionen är alltmer synlig och där den tidigare förgivettagna idén om att modernisering leder till sekularisering har kommit att ifrågasättas eller överges. Det faktum att teorier om sekularisering nu ifrågasätts ger upphov till nya gränsdragningar, nya allianser och nya former av kunskapsproduktion. Socialt arbete är onekligen en del i detta nya tillstånd genom sitt ökade intresse för religion. Detta tar sig bland annat uttryck i att det offentligt organiserade sociala arbetet i ökad utsträckning samarbetar med civilsamhället, och inte minst med det religiösa civilsamhället. Dessutom har forskare på fältet kommit att allt tydligare uppmärksamma det religiösa sociala arbetets roll för framväxten av ett professionellt socialt arbete, vilket har lett till ett omvärderande av fältets historia.

Mycket talar alltså för att religionens ställning i det sociala arbetet har kommit att omförhandlas och att nya koalitioner och nya arbetssätt har kommit att växa fram.

Mot bakgrund av ovan nämnda omförhandlande av den sekulära ordningen inom socialt arbete är föreliggande avhandling ett bidrag till en bredare akademisk diskussion gällande frågan om hur socialt arbete kan förhålla sig till religion. Med utgångspunkt i ett empiriskt material som består av intervjuer med personer som arbetar praktiskt för att motverka extremism och främja demokrati söker avhandlingen förstå på vilka premisser religion kan förstås inom socialt arbete. Genom genealogisk metod studeras ett antal förgivettagna idéer om religion som förekommer inom det sociala arbetets praktik, vilka sedan analyseras och kontextualiseras med hjälp av idéhistoriska studier och litteratur. Avhandlingen söker skriva 'samtidens historia' genom att visa vilka kontroverser och debatter som har format samtiden, med yttersta syftet att utmana den till synes naturgivna positionen. Studien identifierar utifrån det empiriska intervjumaterialet fyra sätt att begreppsliggöra och arbeta med religion. Dessa fördjupas sedan genom historisk analys där jag visar vilka grundvalar de respektive synsätten vilar på. Detta görs i syfte att problematisera och utforska andra, mer fruktbara sätt att förstå och arbeta med religion i socialt arbete. Det övergripande syftet med studien är därmed deskriptivt, kritiskt och konstruktivt, med yttersta syfte att utforska alternativa sätt att begreppsliggöra och arbeta med religion i socialt arbete.

I analysen identifieras ett släktskap mellan hur religion förstås på fältet och en ideologiskt informerad sekularism, så som den har kommit att växa fram i det moderna väst. I sekularistisk anda tenderar religion att beskrivas antingen som en uppsättning läror och rigida system, alternativt enbart som inre känsla och tro. En sådan ideologiskt informerad sekularism tenderar emellertid att förbise andra religiösa uttryck, något som blir särskilt tydligt när vi rör oss bortom västerländsk kristendom eller protestantism. Det finns religiösa traditioner och religiösa uttryck som inte låter sig reduceras till inre tro, men samtidigt inte heller till regler och läror. Den huvudsakliga slutsatsen som kan dras är att om socialt arbete ska kunna arbeta produktivt med religion bör socialarbetare vara rustade med begrepp som kan överskrida en snäv, typiskt västerländsk/modern/sekulär syn på religion. Annars är risken att praktiker misstolkar eller i värsta fall omedvetet tvingar in religiösa personer i en snäv förståelse av religion, ett arbete som många gånger kan vara direkt kontraproduktivt. Arbetet blir lätt konfrontatoriskt, snarare än öppet och konstruktivt. Om syftet är att motverka sociala problem och nå nya insikter så utgör sällan konfrontation en god grund för produktiva samtal.

Mot bakgrund av detta föreslår jag i avhandlingen ett alternativt sätt att definiera religion på, ett sätt som enligt min mening kan erbjuda ett mer produktivt och fruktbart

i ett brett arbete med religion inom socialt arbete. Med utgångspunkt i den tyska fenomenologin med Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger och Alfred Schütz i spetsen menar jag att religion kan förstås som en *livsvärld* i fenomenologisk mening. Religion som livsvärld innebär att se religion som en meningshorisont, något som föregår det individuella valet och som skänker mening till handlande, tänkande och kännande. Denna alternativa definition utvecklas i slutet av avhandlingen.

Avhandlingen är uppdelad i sju kapitel, varav inledningskapitlet innehåller bakgrundsbeskrivning, metoddiskussion, syfte och teoretiskt ramverk. Kapitel 2 studerar framväxten av ett socialt arbete mot extremism, med särskilt fokus på hur religion har kommit att få ett sådant förklaringsvärde i samtida debatter och arbeten kopplade till terrorism och radikalisering. Kapitlet visar hur teorier som tydligt särskiljer religiös terrorism från sekulär terrorism, med argumentet att den förra anses vara mer våldsam och urskillningslös än den senare, har kommit att influera policy. Religion antas därmed kunna reduceras till blind och kompromisslös tro på det sublima, med resultatet att den religiösa terrorismen inte längre anses vara rotad i politiska, ekonomiska eller materiella faktorer. Den religiösa terrorismen anses inte ens ha som mål att förändra världen, utan har primärt hinsides mål. Detta resulterar i ett övervägande intresse för tro, där ideologin - det vill säga det intellektuella och systematiska innehållet i politiken eller religion – många gånger anses vara den direkta orsaken till våld. Mer drastiskt kan man säga att den våldsbejakande ideologin ses som ett virus: något som smittar människor och skapar radikaler eller antidemokrater, något som tar sig i uttryck att forskare och praktiker studerar och söker motverka de miljöer och faktorer som anses bidra till *spridningen* av den farliga ideologin. Det konstateras övergripande i kapitel 2 att religion, här i bemärkelsen *läror*, således erhåller en central plats i arbetet mot extremism.

Kapitel 3–6 utgör huvudparten av avhandlingen och består av fyra teman; (1) religion som kognitivt innehåll; (2) religion som inre tro; (3) religion som fritt val; (4) religion och det religiösa språket. Samtliga kapitel har strukturen att först studera och analysera delar av intervjumaterialet för att därefter situera arbetet genom historisk och teoretisk analys. I kapitel 3 undersöks ett arbetssätt och ett förhållande till religion inom arbete mot extremism och främjande av demokrati där praktiker fokuserar på det idémässiga eller läromässiga i religionen. Annorlunda uttryckt, religion i detta arbete tenderar ibland att reduceras till dess ideologiska eller doktrinära element. Detta tar sig uttryck i att praktiker på fältet i vissa fall arbetar med att försöka motbevisa specifika religiösa idéer, ofta med argumentet att dessa är sekteristiska, ovanliga eller i vissa fall felaktiga. Dessa argument används sedan som en del i en

strategi att motverka extrema uttryck i religionen, med antagandet att om en lära motbevisas så förändras således också dispositionen hos den religiösa individen.

Utifrån det teoretiska ramverk som används i studien drar jag slutsatsen att arbetet och resonemanget kring att motbevisa problematiska läror bär spår av en intellektualistisk förståelse av religion. För att spåra den intellektualistiska läsningen av religion undersöker jag genealogiskt hur en sådan syn har kommit att växa fram. Intellektualism kan spåras tillbaka till framväxten av den moderna vetenskapen där sanning antar formen av (mot)bevisbara påståenden, samt vidare till framväxten av jämförande religionsvetenskap. Religion, inom ramen för jämförande religionsvetenskap, blir ett paraplybegrepp för att förstå och kunna jämföra olika system av läror som den individuella människan sedan antas antingen acceptera eller avvisa.

Men denna förståelse av religion är långt ifrån självklar. Att det ideologiska stoffet endast riktar sig mot intellektet är något som såväl förmoderna som moderna/aktuella teologer ställer sig tveksamma till. Dogmer och läror handlar i lika stor utsträckning om den religiösa praktiken och om att fostra en viss sorts subjektsposition och en viss sorts kroppslighet. Med andra ord, en religiös disposition är likaledes en *förkroppsligad* disposition, vilken också många gånger ligger bortom direkt bevisande eller motbevisande. Med stöd i den amerikanske teologen George Lindbeck kan det anföras att läror är som grammatiken i ett språk; ett sätt att begreppsliggöra världen på. Det vill säga, läror är inte bara sanningskapande utan kanske primärt *meningsskapande*. Med denna utgångspunkt ter sig ovan beskrivna försök att motbevisa läror som relativt improduktiv, med tanke på att det går ut på att motbevisa något som primärt är förkroppsligat, moraliskt, meningsskapande. Socialt arbete borde inte begränsa sig till att identifiera och arbeta med det intellektuella innehållet i religion, utan även dess förkroppsligande, såväl i institutioner som i den individuella människans kropp. En tentativ konklusion här blir att en sådan position vore ett mer produktivt förhållningssätt till religion och sociala problem.

I kapitel 4 undersöks en förståelse av religion primärt som inre tro och inre känsla. I arbete mot extremism och främjande av demokrati beskrivs såväl religion som demokrati som något den individuella människan har gjort till sin egen övertygelse. Jag kommer här ta demokrati som exempel för att visa detta, men mitt argument är att både demokrati och religion primärt beskrivs som inre tro. I praktiken innebär denna tankefigur att arbete för att främja demokrati inte sällan antar formen av ett antal försök att få individer att börja tro på demokratins idé och praktik. Praktiker beskriver hur de försöker så frö hos ungdomar att tänka på sin egen roll i ett samhälle, vilket typ av samhälle de vill ha och hur de själva ser på demokrati. I vissa fall handlar det om

att få individerna att se demokratins möjligheter, att inte se sig som begränsad, marginaliserad, utan att det finns en väg genom demokratin; en möjlighet att emancipera sig och få sin röst hörd. Det vill säga, arbetet går primärt ut på att få personer att tro att demokratins väg är den rätta vägen eller att demokratin innehåller ett löfte om frigörelse. Att vara demokrat innebär att ha en internaliserad tro på demokrati, och i vissa fall att ha en genomtänkt och väl reflekterad idé om precis vad demokrati är, enligt vad som framkommer i intervjumaterialet. Demokratin kommer, utifrån en sådan förståelsehorisont, inte utifrån (genom olika typer av krav eller formaliserade system) utan inifrån och genom att individen *inser* varför demokratin är en överlägsen styrform.

I arbetet framkommer det därmed att demokrati och religion anses vila tungt på inre övertygelser. Det innebär inte sällan försök att få personer att utveckla sin egen uppfattning om vad demokrati eller religion är. Religionen och ideologin blir subjektivistisk och expressivistisk genom att kopplas till subjektets egna uppfattningar, önskningar, tankar eller känslor. Religion, om vi återgår till den, blir ett uttryck för det inre, autentiska som i vissa fall tar sig praktiska uttryck, till exempel i en trosakt. Genealogiskt kan denna idé spåras tillbaka till framväxten av modern subjektivitet och till idén om att vi alla har en inre kärna eller ett själv, alltså till en sorts modern solipsism. I Charles Taylors arbeten framkommer det att det moderna innerlighetsidealet vilar på gränsdragningen mellan det yttre och det inre, en distinktion som är typisk för en modern/västerländsk syn på subjektet, som alltså består i en allt starkare tro på det autentiska jaget. Religionen inom moderniteten blir ett uttryck för människans subjektivitet och individualitet. Taylor visar övertygande hur en sådan förståelse av människan som bärare av en inre kärna och med egna, idiosynkratiska spirituella projekt, inte med nödvändighet fångar hela det religiösa spektret och han visar vidare hur en förståelse av religion enbart som inre tro tenderar att leda till vantolkningar varigenom religiösa uttryck anses bottna i inre tro istället för, exempelvis, social tillhörighet.

Med hjälp av den franske filosofen Louis Althusser kan vi snarare anta att religion i vissa fall inte är rotad i individens inre tro eller känslor, utan tvärtom, att viss praktik och religiös struktur/kontext formar den inre tron. Individen går inte uteslutande till sin församling för att hon tror, hon tror också genom att hon är med i en församling. För det sociala arbetets räkning blir alltså argumentet utifrån denna undersökning att praktikers förgivettaganden om att religiös praxis är rotad i en inre tro står i vägen för andra typer av förståelser. Praktiker missar därmed möjligheten att se inre tro och praktik som ett dynamiskt och ömsesidigt konstitutivt förhållande till varandra. Ett likställande mellan religion och inre tro fångar endast vissa religiösa traditioner (om

någon alls), men överfört till exempelvis judendomen blir det helt missvisande eftersom det är just den inre tron som skiljer kristendom och judendom åt (den senare är inte att betrakta uteslutande som en sorts trossystem).

Poängen är att om vi utgår från en expressivistisk definition av religion i socialt arbete så riskerar praktiker att missförstå religion genom att förutsätta att det alltid finns ett troende och autentiskt subjekt bakom varje trosakt. Praktiker riskerar att utgå från att individer utför vissa handlingar enbart på grund av tro, trots att det finns många anledningar till att begå handlingar, inte alla direkt kopplade till tron. Våld är ett tydligt exempel genom att det många gånger uppstår i en konkret situation som ibland *retroaktivt* ges ideologiska förklaringar. Den våldsbejakande ideologin kan alltså i vissa fall vara ett *utfall* av våldet, inte dess egentliga orsak. Risken med en uteslutande expressivistisk religionsteori är att praktiker helt förbiser detta och förutsätter att en individs beteende beror på övertygelse snarare än att ha relationella, situationella eller materiella orsaker. Dessutom finns det alltid en risk att praktiker tvingar in religiösa medborgare i en snäv definition av religion som inre tro. Än mer drastiskt kan man säga att ett religionsbegrepp som likställer religion med inre tro riskerar att slå över i religiös imperialism, försök att utforma alla religioner utefter kristna och/eller sekulära normer. Denna risk blir kanske än mer tydligare i analysen i nästa kapitel.

I kapitel 5 analyserar jag frihetsbegreppet och dess plats i sekularismen. I intervjumaterialet beskrivs religion som ett fritt val och vissa av informanterna understryker särskilt att religion inte bestäms av religiösa auktoriteter eller skrifter. I arbetet med frågor gällande extremism och demokrati blir en icke-auktoritär religion en sorts motpol till den extrema religionen. Praktiker uttrycker hur sociala problem som polarisering, extremism och rasism kan motverkas genom att visa att religionens kärna inte består i att följa regler eller auktoriteter, utan att det istället förstås som det fria egna valet och det egna sättet att förhålla sig till sin egen religion och tradition. Därmed ställer praktiker religiösa regler och läror mot det fria valet och den privata religionen, där det senare används som ett sätt att motverka extremism.

För att förstå hur denna syn på religion som något som står i kontrast till läror eller auktoriteter har vuxit fram studerar jag framväxten av det moderna frihetsbegreppet, och i synnerhet i dess teologiska tappning. Synen på religion som fritt val som uttrycks här kan spåras tillbaka till universaliestriden i slutet av medeltiden, en teologisk kontrovers rörande bland annat Guds vilja. Enligt nominalistisk teologi, som i sig är en kritik av den medeltida thomismen, är Gud primärt *vilja*. Guds yttersta karaktäristik består i Guds allsmäktighet eller omnipotens. Enligt detta synsätt blir universalier ett hot mot Guds omnipotens genom att binda Gud till en gudomlig plan. Eller enklare uttryckt; nominalisterna kom att likställa frihet med *absolut* frihet, frihet som

obundenhet. Denna teologiska idé om Guds obundenhet överförs sedermera till människan varpå en ny sorts frihet, definierad som autonomi eller möjligheten att agera helt utefter eget gottfinnande, växer fram. I kölvattnet av universaliestriden blir frihet synonymt med att vara befriad yttre krav, normer eller regler. Autonomibegreppet studeras vidare genealogiskt genom en annan teologisk kontrovers, den mellan Martin Luther och Erasmus av Rotterdam som handlar om just frihet. Enligt Luther propagerar Erasmus för en ny förståelse av frihet genom sin teologiska utläggning, en frihet som består i en sorts neutral vilja: en vilja som inte vill något särskilt. Mot denna frihet ställer Luther frihet som gåva, frihet som är helt avhängig Guds nåd. Enligt Luther har viljan alltid en riktning: den vill antingen gott, eller ont, men den är aldrig neutral.

Genom dessa två debatter växer en idé om frihet fram, där frihet förstås i kontrast till regler, underkastelse eller auktoriteter. Men debatterna visar också att det moderna frihetsbegreppet är långt ifrån självklart eller oantastligt. För att ytterligare historisera och avnaturalisera idén om frihet som autonomi tar jag avstamp i den franske filosofen Félix Ravaisson. Hos Ravaisson blir frihet endast möjlig genom vanan, vilket förkroppsligar viljan. Kroppen blir ett viljans verktyg, just genom vanan. Enligt Ravaisson är vana inte ren repetition utan innehåller med nödvändighet förändringar i subjektets disposition. Vanan är konstituerad av två till synes motstridiga tillstånd: genom vanan blir handlingar mindre medvetna, mer rutinartade, men samtidigt är det just denna rutinartade karaktär som möjliggör kreativitet. Exemplet med pianisten är träffande: den skickliga pianisten behöver inte fokusera på fingrarna som i det närmaste rör sig automatiskt över tangenterna, men samtidigt blir pianisten än mer medveten om själva stycket som spelas. Trots automatisering förfinas viljan och kroppens vanemässiga konstitution blir ett instrument för viljan, snarare än, som det ofta framställs inom den moderna filosofin, som ett hot mot den. Vad Ravaisson ger uttryck för i sin filosofi är alltså hur regelmässighet, auktoritet eller vanor inte måste vara ett hot mot viljan och friheten, utan kan snarare utgöra själva *grundbetingelsen* för frihet. Ravaisson visar således att modernitetens syn på frihet – frihet definierad som autonomi – inte med nödvändighet innefattar progression – från bunden till fri. Tvärtom är autonomiidealet ett långt ifrån självklart sätt att förstå frihet på, och likaledes även när det gäller religion.

För att tydliggöra vad Ravaisson ger oss i socialt arbete kan det vara värt att påminna om den belägenhet som den västerländska feminismen har hamnat i när det gäller islam och slöjan. Genom att betrakta slöjan som ett uttryck för patriarkalt förtryck varigenom normer och patriarkala strukturer ses som ett hot mod den kvinnliga friheten har många feminister kommit att fördöma slöjan. Den västerländska

feminismen har stundtals försökt frigöra kvinnor från sina ”linnefängelser”, om man vill vara drastisk. I västerländska samhällen tolereras förvisso ofta slöjan, men endast då den framställs som kvinnans eget val. Men är inte denna syn på valfrihet paradoxalt nog ett sorts tvång: ett tvång att avsäga sig sina rutinartade, normativa eller tillhörighetsmässiga skäl och ersätta dessa med idiosynkrasi eller valfrihet? Eller annorlunda uttryckt: är inte kravet på ett eget val samtidigt ett sätt att skära av individens rötter, att ersätta en socialt, kulturellt och religiöst meningsfull livsvärld med en abstrakt universalitet á la liberalism? För socialt arbetes räkning vill jag utifrån undersökningen ovan hålla upp ett varningens finger för att alltför tydligt likställa frihet med valfrihet, eftersom ett sådant likställande kan leda till en sorts imperialism och ett förnekande av olikheter, vilket i sin tur också bidrar till att förvandla individen till en atomistisk varelse som till varje pris ska frikopplas från sitt kulturella sammanhang. Risken, om man drar det till sin spets, blir att socialarbetare försöker frigöra personer som, enligt deras egen förståelse, inte är i behov av att frigöras. Snarare än att utgå från en syn på religion som essentiellt rotad i en (val)frihetstanke bör socialarbetaren undersöka mer öppet hur det förhåller sig med relationen mellan klienters livsvärld, deras frihet och deras religion.

I det sista av de analytiska kapitlen, kapitel 6, undersöker jag det religiösa språkets roll i ett nu framväxande arbete med religiösa aktörer och interreligiösa dialoger. Interreligiös dialog har särskilt kommit att bli ett verktyg inom arbetet för att motverka extremism och främja demokrati, en trend som är tydlig inte bara på just det området. Men denna nya trend att arbeta med religiös dialog har också kommit att innebära att religiös dialog har fått en lite annan struktur och funktion. I den ekumeniska traditionen var religiös dialog ett sätt att kultivera tro genom att mötas över gränser. Idag däremot tenderar religiös dialog att bli ett verktyg eller instrument för olika praktiker, där syftet är att minska konflikter mellan religiösa grupper. Religiös dialog har på det sättet kommit att utgöra ett verktyg för att minska risken för radikalisering och extremism.

För att säga något om hur socialt arbete i bred bemärkelse kan arbeta med religiös dialog undersöker jag initialt den tyske filosofen Jürgen Habermas och dennes teorier om den publika sfären och *reciproka översättningar*. Enligt Habermas bör offentligheten vara konstituerad av ömsesidigt översättande av religiösa respektive sekulära anspråk och argument, vilka ska formuleras i neutrala och universellt tillgängliga termer. Religiöst språk översättsmed fördel till neutrala anspråk medan sekulära medborgare å sin sida ska formulera sina anspråk på sätt som inte utgår från vetenskaplig hegemoni (för Habermas utgör vetenskap och religionen varandras motsatser). Sekulära medborgare bör dessutom medge att deras sekulära anspråk kan

ha en religiös grund som inte kan bortses ifrån. Efter att ha studerat Habermas position övergår jag i en mer kritisk inställning. Med stöd hos bland andra den tyske filosofen Walter Benjamin hävdar jag att något går förlorat i översättningsprocesser, något specifikt för en grupp eller en kultur som inte kan översättas. Det innebär enligt mitt synsätt att om man vill uppnå fruktbara samtal mellan olika religiösa grupper, eller mellan religiösa och sekulära, bör man inte försöka eliminera skillnader. För är det inte just i mötet med den Andra som löftet om dialog och möte finns? Istället för att sträva efter universalism och homogenisering av kulturer kan man istället anta att fruktbara samtal med nödvändighet innehåller en risk eller en potentiell konfliktyta, vilket således samtidigt utgör ett löfte om försoning och förståelse.

Utifrån denna kritik av Habermas undersöker jag vidare historiskt idén om religion som i grunden konfliktfylld, intolerant eller misogyn som återfinns i delar av intervjumaterialet, och inom socialt arbete i stort, vilket inte sällan leder till försök att ersätta en antidemokratisk syn med västerländska värderingar i form av demokrati, mänskliga rättigheter eller tolerans. Efter att ha undersökt relationen mellan intolerans och religion historiskt kommer jag fram till att en sådan beskrivning av religionen som i grunden intolerant är svår att bibehålla. I avhandlingen undersöker jag exemplet om den misogyna religionen. Det visar sig då att den framväxande sekularismen var allt annat än en lösning på kvinnoförtryck. Sekularismen tydliggjorde snarare gränsdragningen mellan det manliga, rationella, publika, å ena sidan, och det kvinnliga, religiösa och irrationella å andra sidan. Faktum är att sekularismen *institutionaliserade* ojämlikhet mellan könen, snarare än motverkade den. Däremot finns det gott stöd i forskningen om att kvinnokamper på många håll i världen har drivits av religiösa aktivister som inte sällan har motiverat sitt kvinnoemancipatoriska engagemang med teologiska undertoner eller argument. Teologin har inte varit en obetydlig bisyssla för dessa aktivister utan har i många fall utgjort själva kärnan i kvinnokampen. Författaren och kväkaren Emilia Fogelklou är ett svenskt exempel på detta, vars kvinnosyn genomsyras av teologiska och/eller religiösa argument.

Det verkar alltså finnas goda skäl att behålla det religiösa språket och inte sträva efter universella eller neutrala anspråk á la Habermas. Ett religiöst språk kan möjligen tala tydligare till religiösa medborgare genom att det är rotat i individernas livsvärld. Eftersom det finns kvinnoemancipatoriska teologiska argument (om vi fortsätter uppehålla oss vid det exemplet) att finna historiskt så är mitt förslag att dessa kultiveras och odlas snarare än, vilket som ofta är fallet, att försöka ”omvända” religiösa medborgare genom att läsa upp mänskliga rättighetsdeklarationer eller förklara vad demokrati är. En kritisk/historisk analys av religionens påstådda intolerans leder mig alltså till att religion med fördel kan förstås vare sig som

intolerant eller som tolerant, utan som kontextuell, men att det kan finnas språk och argument i den religiösa livsvärlden som kan kultiveras på ett fruktbart sätt om vi exempelvis vill motverka kvinnoförtryck.

I det sjunde och sista kapitlet summerar jag det alternativa religionsbegrepp som utarbetats genom genealogin. Övergripande kan det sägas att de sätt som religion förstås i intervjumaterialet har tydliga kopplingar till framväxten av västerländsk sekularism där religion ofta förstås antingen som inre tro och känsla, eller som rigida system och sanningspåståenden. Mot en sekularistisk syn på religion ställer jag religion som livsvärld. Med utgångspunkt i den tyska och franska fenomenologin menar jag att religion är en *meningshorisont*. Husserls kritik av vetenskaplig reduktion blir en språngbräda för mitt eget resonerande. Husserl menar att vetenskapen alienerar oss från den levda världen. Livsvärldens upplevda och praktiska dimensioner försvinner i ett virrvarr av atomer, grundämnen eller signalsubstanser, som i sig anses vara den riktiga världen. Den upplevda världen blir en skenbild av den egentliga mätbara eller objektifierbara världen. Samma kritik skulle kunna riktas mot hur religionen berövas sin kroppslighet, institutionalisering och inneboende mening genom den intellektualisering av religion som beskrevs ovan. Genom att reducera religionen till intellektuella sanningsanspråk blir det svårt att förstå förändring på teologins eller religions område. Om vi istället riktar blicken mot hur religion alltid är levd så kan vi också se hur en viss lära, en viss doktrin, alltid är ett svar på det samhälle som individerna befinner sig i. Det finns ingen Islam med stort I som praktiker kan luta sig mot för att motbevisa den tolkning som extremister åberopar för att rättfärdiga olika typer av våldshandlingar. Heidegger menar att vi alltid möter världen pragmatiskt, utifrån en vilja att göra något. Om livsvärlden är pragmatisk bör således även en religiös livsvärld betraktas som pragmatiskt orienterad, snarare än uteslutande som symbolisk, vilket annars är brukligt.

Genom fenomenologin kan vi ta oss an det problem som diskuterades ovan gällande religion som inre känsla och tro. Mot solipsismen menar Husserl att subjektivitet med nödvändighet är *inter*subjektivitet. Mitt medvetande uppstår inte isolerat utan i relation till den yttre världen. Hans begrepp *intentionalitet* visar just hur mitt medvetande uppstår när jag riktar min blick mot världen, och således också mot andra människor. Jag är alltid medveten *om* någonting, det finns inget abstrakt eller latent medvetande. Det innebär vidare att vårt agerande och vårt handlande aldrig kan föregå mening eller socialitet. Mot bakgrund av den synen på subjektivitet som en produkt av livsvärlden blir således idén om inre subjektiv tro problematisk, eftersom inre tro alltid redan är social, alltid formad i relation till omvärlden. En syn på religion som i grunden social, rotad i livsvärlden, kan ersätta det moderna religionsbegreppets

ensidiga fokus på individen och få oss att se att religion alltid är grundad i gemenskap, i institution, att *religionen alltid har en kropp*. Det innebär också, menar jag, att vi kan utarbeta mer inkluderande religionsbegrepp, och därigenom undvika misstaget att se individuell tro som det enda legitima uttrycket för religiös tillhörighet.

Detta blir kanske än mer tydligt om det relateras till diskussionen om det individuella fria valet. Inom fenomenologin föregås alltid det individuella valet, den isolerade akten, av mening. Den franske filosofen Maurice Merleau-Ponty formulerar det träffande när han säger att vi är *dömda* till mening. Det finns således inte ett tillfälle som föregås av mening där ett neutralt val skulle kunna tas. Eller för att säga samma sak med Luthers ord: viljan har alltid en riktning. Det innebär inte att vi faller tillbaka i determinism. Paul Ricœur menar att livsvärlden aldrig helt sammanfaller med subjektets horisont. Det innebär, enligt min tolkning, att även i det mest rigida regelföljande finns öppning till förändring, till kritik, till att saker kan vara annorlunda. Att utgå från religion som ett fritt val blir således något missvisande och en syn på religionen som livsvärld kan istället möjliggöra ett arbete som kan identifiera och arbeta med agens och frihet även när frihet förstås som att följa en regel eller en auktoritet. Därmed får vi ett bättre, mer inkluderande och mer nyanserat religionsbegrepp. Slutligen blir argumentet om det religiösa språket begripligt genom fenomenologin, där det förutsätts att en kritik av religiösa strukturer eller sociala problem med nödvändighet bör formuleras i relation till medborgarnas egna språk, förståelsehorisont och livsvärld. Produktiva arbeten med religiösa medborgare bör ta sin utgångspunkt i den livsvärld som medborgarna lever i, snarare än att försöka ersätta en religiös livsvärld med en demokratisk/liberal/sekulär livsvärld.

Slutpoängen som kan göras utifrån denna undersökning är att det sociala arbetet blir mer produktivt och konstruktivt i sitt arbete med religion om det utgår från att den religiösa livsvärlden, precis som alla andra livsvärldar, aldrig helt sammanfaller med individernas horisonter. Det finns alltid en spricka, en öppning för omtolkning och immanent kritik. Som alternativ till en bild av religion som antingen statisk eller som rakt igenom subjektiv som missar religionens kroppsliga, institutionella och praktiska dimensioner, vill jag ställa en syn på religionen som kan ta religionens kroppslighet, religionens institutionella, sociala och praktiska dimensioner på allvar, utan att för den delen falla in i en syn på religion som stelnad eller rigid. Livsvärlden är aldrig fullkomlig eller total, den tar aldrig individen helt i anspråk utan lämnar alltid utrymme för förändring och kritik. Socialarbetare kan utifrån det synsättet gå i kritisk och konstruktiv dialog med religiösa klienter, utan att för den sakens skull försöka motbevisa eller hitta helt andra synsätt än det befintliga.

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10. APPENDIX: LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

The following interviewees were included in the study:

Margarethe is a social worker in one of the areas from which many individuals travelled to join the war in Syria and the terror organisation ISIS (The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria). As a social worker, she focuses mainly on issues concerning integration, as well as on preventing extremism. In her work she meets with and organises meetings with religious congregations. She has organised a school of democracy and has worked intensely with preventing extremism locally. I interviewed Margarethe twice. One interview revolved around her work generally as related to extremism and democracy. In the second interview, she and Sara elaborated on and described the school of democracy they had recently organised.

Sara works with Margarethe and is also a social worker. I have limited knowledge about her work, but I interviewed her because of her engagement in the school of democracy that she and Margarethe organised. During the interview, she recounted personal anecdotes about the school of democracy, and elaborated on what she found difficult, what went well, and so forth.

Erica is a social worker in a Swedish municipality. She works as a coordinator for security and preparedness, and has worked extensively with issues of radicalisation and extremism. She was selected to participate because of her work with violent extremism and her role as coordinator, since this gives her an overview of the work conducted in the field. During the interview, we mainly discussed her work, what she perceives as problematic, and what forms of work she deems successful. She also told me about some issues when it comes to working to prevent extremism, such as the intense media critique she has been subjected to.

Marie is a social worker in a municipality. She works at a family centre as a coordinator for the work against violent extremism and other issues. She has organised a hotline that radicals as well as worried relatives, friends, teachers or other social workers can call and ask for help. She has also organised discussion groups for mothers, with lectures on topics such as honour violence. She has close contact with an imam, as well as with John and Anders, whom I interviewed for their work in a civil society project (see below). She was selected because she is a central actor in the work to prevent extremism and has contact with a variety of other actors. The interview revolved around her various tasks, what she finds difficult when working with these issues, as well as personal reflections and anecdotes from her work.

George is a coordinator for the work against extremism in one of the municipalities from which several individuals have travelled to join the war in Syria. Much of his work has been to direct the overall work in the municipality and to organise and work with the development of action plans and similar documents. He was selected because of his position as coordinator, and because religious extremism has been greatly discussed in the city where he works. During the interview, we discussed his work, how he came to be involved in these issues, and what they do in the municipality.

Lucas is a police officer in one of the municipalities from which several individuals have travelled to join the war in Syria. He is involved in coordinating the work to prevent extremism in the same city as George. The interview revolved around his involvement in the work against extremism, the police's cooperation with the surrounding society, and sometimes the lack thereof. He told personal anecdotes from working with these issues and we discussed them. Lucas was selected for the same reasons as George: this city has been particularly afflicted by religious extremism.

Sandra works with security issues at a Swedish municipality and has been (but is no longer) involved in the work against extremism. She has worked with several projects, principally with a quite large project that was later cancelled. The interview mainly revolved around her work on that project. Sandra was asked to participate because of her work in organising projects related to violent extremism.

Mary is the leader of a civil society project that works to prevent radicalisation and violent extremism. The project has practitioners working in the field and in suburban areas, and works closely with youth centres and with practitioners who come in contact with young people. An important part of the project is educating practitioners in theories and practices related to violent extremism and radicalisation. The project also works proactively with young people to foster democratic values and prevent violent extremism. Mary was selected because of the project's active engagement in the field of violent extremism and because it has several practitioners who work

directly, preventatively and long-term, in certain vulnerable areas. The interview largely revolved around the project; its purposes, how it conceptualises radicalisation, what role religion may or may not have in relation to extremism. I interviewed her and Anders at the same time.

Anders works in the same project as Mary, and they were interviewed simultaneously. Anders is a lecturer who works with exit programmes in the project, although he is merely involved in the work, not formally employed by the project (as Mary is). He too was selected because their project is closely related to preventing extremism, which is an important part of their work. Anders is further frequently involved in many different forms of work to prevent radicalisation, such as with municipalities or in schools. During the interview, we discussed his views on radicalisation, and his work with exit programmes.

John is a lecturer who has experience with conflict resolution both in war zones and in vulnerable suburban areas in Sweden. He works closely with the project led by Mary. He previously worked for the UN and for several Swedish municipalities. John was selected to participate in the study because of his experience working with violent extremism and radicalisation and with conflict resolution, both internationally and nationally in Sweden. John is also frequently involved in projects and municipal work. The interview revolved around his views on the subject of radicalisation, and the differences between civil society and government organisations in these matters.

Linda has a background as a Lutheran minister and works for a civil society organisation that works with exit programmes and has dialogue projects. She was selected because her work closely relates to the two core concepts of this study: religion and extremism. She works in several projects, one of which is especially concerned with religious dialogue intended to reduce stereotypes, conflict, prejudices against religious citizens, and extremism. The interview revolved around her work and her ideas about religion and the prevention of extremism.

Anne is the project leader of a civil society project: a school project organised by a centre for interreligious dialogue with the main purpose of preventing stereotypes, prejudices, racism, oppression and extremism, and promoting tolerance, human rights and democracy. The main part of her work is to visit schools and discuss religion and faith, as well as broader issues such as ethics, group dynamics and similar topics with the students. The project does not set out to locate or identify extremists but works broadly to prevent polarisation in society and, she tells me, to wash the extremism stamp off religion. The students visit different congregations where a representative from the congregation answers students' questions and talks about his or her faith.

During the interview, we mainly discuss her work in schools, her experiences in the classroom, and her experiences working with different congregations.

Helen is a Lutheran minister who works as a counsellor in prisons. She has also been involved as a consultant in the Swedish Prison and Probation Service's work against extremism. Her daily work is not directly related to violent extremism (rehabilitation falls outside the scope of a prison counsellor's work). However, since radicalisation has become a topic in prison discourse, she is well aware of these issues and has been involved in this work as an expert. This is the reason that she was selected to participate in this study of how religion is discussed within the context of work to prevent extremism. During the interview, we mainly discussed her views on religion, the problems that may arise within prisons, and her role as an expert.

Camilla is a politician who has come into contact with violent extremism through her political work. She has been engaged in debate and shaping political opinion and in policy formation regarding extremism, and is particularly concerned with religious extremism in the suburbs. Her engagement with these issues is the reason she was included in this study. Also, much of her work is linked to the street-level context, in the sense that she has met with practitioners and has worked on guidelines and policy relevant to street-level work.

Zoey is an associate professor of political science and her expertise lies primarily in political organisations. She has been involved in governmental work regarding threats to politicians and with issues concerning violent extremism. She is also involved in a school of democracy, where she lectures about democracy. She was included in the study because of her involvement with government policy concerning radicalisation, extremism and democracy, as well as her. practical work in regard to democracy. The interview revolved around her views on how to promote democracy.

Carl is a researcher and lecturer in religion and ethics. He has organised and taught classes for practitioners working to prevent extremism. He has also been involved in projects outside academia concerning violent extremism. The main reason Carl was asked to participate is his engagement with practitioners, such as teaching classes for practitioners and working directly in projects with practitioners. The interview revolved around his experiences of working as an expert in this field and his views on matters such as religion and extremism.

Mark is a professor of religion who specialises in Islamic theology. He has conducted historical research on classical texts as well as research on contemporary Islam and Muslims. Mark was asked to participate mainly because he has worked closely with forums that are connected to practitioners outside academia. He has written policy reports and has worked directly with practitioners. His knowledge of

the subject and his interaction with the practical field were the main reasons he was asked to participate.

Noel is a professor of Islamic theology with a primarily historical orientation. He has not had much direct involvement in practical work. However, after writing a number of texts on radical Islam, he was asked to lecture to practitioners on theological matters, and it was this engagement that motivated his inclusion in the study. The interview revolved around how he became an expert in the practical field, how he conceives of his own role, and the pitfalls and challenges he perceives. Noel described his approach to Islamic radicalism and how knowledge and research can be framed to make it useful for practitioners.

Hans is now a retired professor of Islamic theology. He has worked extensively on the subject of Islamic terrorism in his research, writing, and lecturing outside academia. He has also served as an expert in practical, governmental work for several years and has first-hand knowledge of what it means to work with practitioners. This is the main reason he was asked to participate.

Richard has a PhD in political science but is currently not affiliated with any university. He works mainly as a researcher and government expert and is involved in various think-tanks. He is involved in matters concerning terrorism and is frequently hired as an expert by the Swedish security police and the Swedish military. Richard has worked with these issues in Sweden as well as internationally, frequently in the Middle East. He was asked to participate mainly because of his experience in working directly with practitioners, both in preventative work and in reactive security work. The interview revolved around his experiences working as an expert with practitioners.

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Ross, M. W. Typing, doing and being. A study of men who have sex with men and sexuality on the Internet. 2006:1

Stoltz, P. Searching for meaning of support in nursing. A study on support in family care of frail aged persons with examples from palliative care at home. 2006:2

Gudmundsson, P. Detection of myocardial ischemia using real-time myocardial contrasts echocardiograpy. 2006:3

Holmberg, L. Communication in palliative home care, grief and bereavement. A mother's experiences. 2007:1

Ny, P. Swedish maternal health care in a multiethnic society – including the fathers. 2007:2

Schölin, T. Etnisk mångfald som organisationsidé. Chefs- och personalpraktiker i äldreomsorgen. 2008:1

Svensson, O. Interactions of mucins with biopolymers and drug delivery particles. 2008:2

Holst, M. Self-care behaviour and daily life experiences in patients with chronic heart failure. 2008:3

Bahtsevani, C. In search of evidence-based practices. Exploring factors influencing evidence based practice and implementation of clinical practice guidelines. 2008:4

Andersson, L. Endocytosis by human dendritic cells. 2009:1

Svendsen, I. E. In vitro and in vivo studies of salivary films at solid/liquid interfaces. 2009:2

Persson, K. Oral health in an outpatient psychiatric population. Oral status, life satisfaction and support. 2009:3

Hellman, P. Human dendritic cells. A study of early events during pathogen recognition and antigen endocytosis. 2009:4

Baghir-Zada, R. Illegal aliens and health (care) wants. The cases of Sweden and the Netherlands. 2009:5

Stjernswärd, S. Designing online support for families living with depression. 2009:6

Carlsson, A. Child injuries at home – prevention, precautions and intervention with focus on scalds. 2010:1

Carlson, E. Sjuksköterskan som handledare. Innehåll i och förutsättningar för sjuksköterskors handledande funktion i verksamhetsförlagd utbildning – en etnografisk studie. 2010:2

Sinkiewicz, G. Lactobacillus reuteri in health and disease. 2010:3

Tuvesson, H. Psychiatric nursing staff and the workplace. Perceptions of the ward atmosphere, psychosocial work environment, and stress. 2011:1

Ingvarsdotter, K. Mental ill health and diversity. Researching human suffering and resilience in a multicultural context. 2011:2

Hamit-Eminovski, J. Interactions of biopolymers and metal complexes at biological interfaces. 2011:3

Mellgren, C. What´s neighbourhood got to do with it? The influence of neighbourhood context on crime and reactions to crime. 2011:4

Annersten Gershater, M. Prevention of foot ulcers in patients with diabetes mellitus. Nursing in outpatient settings. 2011:5

Pooremamali P. Culture, occupation and occupational therapy in a mental care context- the challenge of meeting the needs of Middle Eastern immigrants. 2012:1

Gustafsson A. Aspects on sepsis: treatment and markers. 2012:2

Lavant, E. Multiplex HLA-DR-DQ genotyping. For genetic epidemiology and clinical risk assessment. 2012:3

Wangel, A-M. Mental ill-health in childbearing women. Markers and risk factors. 2012:4

Scaramuzzino, R. Equal opportunities? - A cross-national comparison of immigrant organisations in Sweden and Italy. 2012:5

Ivert, A-K. Adolescent mental health and utilisation of psychiatric care - The role of parental country of birth and neighbourhood of residence 2013:1

Znamenskaya, Y. Effect of hydration on thermodynamic, rheological and structural

properties of mucin. 2013:2

Andersson, F. The female offender. Patterning of antisocial and criminal activity over the lifecourse. 2013:3

Lindroth, M. Utsatthet och sexuell hälsa – en studie om unga på statliga ungdomshem. 2013:4

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This dissertation offers an alternative to the secularistic notion of religion observed in aspects of social work directed at preventing violent extremism. It argues that recognising religion as a lifeworld that constructs meaning will enable social work to escape the limited understanding of religion as either purely intellectual or purely subjective. Instead, it will be able to view religion as something that is also and always embodied and institutionalised. Informed by this phenomenological approach, social work can assume that religious interpretations are never fixed. Productive engagement with religion and social problems thus requires encouraging discussions from within the lifeworld, rather than adopting the common approach of trying to replace a religious worldview with a different worldview.

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