The Interplay Between the Contemporary Sacred and Secular

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Initially my aim was to bring together the following – the early Hegel (particularly his early theory of spirit in connection to his theory of Fate and his early critique of Kantian morality) the religious thinking of William James[1] and the work of three contemporary philosophers, John McDowell, Charles Taylor and A.W. Moore. I then intended to use this material to rethink secularism, particularly the normative constraints that ground the separation of church and state. It is this division that is the ultimate focus of this paper. Some see that this division is of secondary importance to a more fundamental issue, captured under the Weberian term 'disenchantment of nature.' To an extent I agree with them but through a consideration of Hegel's early theory of spirit my aim is to show that prior to any disenchantment of nature that there exists a problematic conceptual or perhaps an attitudinal relation to self and world and that this is a pre-condition of such disenchantment. At the practical level this problematic relation of self and world manifests in institutional division and at a theoretical level the same relation manifests as disenchantment. So, before we can begin to see the world as the realm of law,[2] devoid of meaning and disenchanted, we have to adopt a certain reactive attitude to it. This attitudinal relation is one that I think is based in a fundamental fracture, a form of self-alienation, whereby the self is held to be something alien to nature yet imprisoned within the natural. This fundamental fracture then manifests in human institutional and intellectual life as seemingly irreconcilable oppositions (Appendix 1.)

What I can present here is limited; a hurried tour through some complex philosophical themes, and certainly I cannot deal with everything pertinent to my topic – so I will hold fast at the theoretical

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[1] In regard to James I would have run both a negative and a positive thesis. Negatively I think that his take on religion reflects the general fracture of mind and world that I am critical of in this essay. Positively his Pragmatism can be fed into the notion that our beliefs and values have an important impact on practical affairs, particularly the actualization of our social and institutional life.

[2] This is a term I am borrowing from John McDowell, which refers to the view of the world that is presupposed by naturalistic philosophers, as a causally closed law governed realm.

level. I want us to think through the possible fate of secularism together, not to tell you what I think that fate is. Yet this ought not lead to the sense that what I present does not reach certain conclusions; I do think that the issues opened up by John McDowell can orientate us to a more wide ranging social critique than is held in the text of *Mind and World* and I will offer the outlines of such a critique, not strictly McDowellian but one that does takes its orientation from McDowell. More radically, I will suggest that liberal democratic theory does seem to articulate a take on the world and a system of values that receives its pre-philosophical orientation from what might be caught under the problematic heading of 'the Protestant worldview': that liberalism is a non-metaphysical form of the post-reformation tradition. Thus current Anglo-American attempts to 'spread democracy' are in fact the expansion of a worldview that is founded in a certain religious outlook: the modern Protestant crusade is one that is based in a non-metaphysical formulation of the Protestant worldview.

Whilst many of us in the Anglo-American world seem unconscious of this, I do not think that this point is lost on many of our friends in the Islamic world. Furthermore I will be arguing that Kant in particular raises a particularly politico-religious formulation of the liberal view to the level of abstract thought. Lastly, whilst much of my focus here falls on the Protestant worldview, the source of the problem is in fact the Judeo-Christian outlook. My focus on Protestantism comes from my decision to make sense of the way the former outlook has fed into the contemporary Anglo-American political life. In conjunction with all this, the secularisation thesis, the thesis that with modern liberal society and its scientific worldview the need for religion will dissipate and the bright sun of science (social and natural) shall illuminate the darkness, not only fails to be adequate to the empirical data, but is a scientistic utopia and, like all utopias, will suffer its own fate at the hands of the real.[3]

John McDowell in his book *Mind and World*,[4] currently the subject of intense philosophical discussion on both sides of what was once the

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[3] Which is not to say that I support the sacralisation thesis. Rather, it is my own belief that the religious environment is not static; both the form and the content of religion are subject to flux. Once this movement is taken account of, I think that religiosity is a rather consistent feature of human life.

[4] J McDowell: *Mind and World*, Cambridge, 2003.

great philosophical divide,[5] tells us that the plight of contemporary philosophy has been created by a problematic picture of the relationship between mind and world. In regard to epistemology, he tells us that we are faced with two, mutually exclusive options: on one hand we could adopt some kind of bald naturalism whereby knowledge is the result of causal impacts from the external world on the sense organs. On such a view the epistemic warrant for our beliefs lie in some causal web that is external to subjectivity – a causal web that we cannot access through reflection but that we can empirically study. In this picture the notion that our beliefs need to be justified through reference to some **reason** for believing them drops away and a causal story takes the place of epistemic justification. In that this view deals with law like causal interactions it is a view that is in harmony with a conception of nature as the realm of law. On the other hand we could be led to some kind of coherentism whereby the only thing that can justify a belief is another belief; but then, since all beliefs are propositional and hence conceptually articulated, the causal impacts of the external world on the subject are not propositional and hence not conceptual and so cannot serve as warrants for a belief because on this view, only another belief can do that. But then the world external to subjectivity in no way warrants our beliefs about it and thought is left spinning in the void of subjectivity.

McDowell claims that this circumstance, whereby we are left with two equally unsatisfying, yet seemingly exhaustive, epistemic orientations, is based in a problematic picture of the relation of mind and world that must be jettisoned. The big mistake, to quote from Charles Lamore, is to think 'that the points at which the world acts causally upon us cannot consist in the exercise of our conceptual capacities.'[6] Naturalists seem to believe 'that such points somehow initiate conceptual thinking, and coherentists that they are, by their nature, unsuited to instruct our thought.'[7] The solution for McDowell is to recognise that the world itself 'is given as already possessed of a conceptual structure, already bound up in relations of warrant and implication.'[8] So the causal impacts on the sense organs are always already conceptual – the conceptual extends all the way out.

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[5] N Smith: *Reading McDowell: On Mind and World*, London, 2003, 1.
[6] C Lamore: *Attending to reasons*, London, 2003, 197.
[7] *Ibid.*
[8] *Ibid.*

This feeds McDowell's ethics, for now 'the ethical is a domain of rational requirements, which are there in any case, whether we are responsive to them or not'[9] – in other words, because of the conceptual structure of experience certain kinds of experience place normative constraints upon us. Whether we are able to recognise these demands, and so be responsive to them, depends on upbringing and whether we have cultivated 'the conceptual capacities necessary to discern them'[10] – but they are there regardless of our capacity to discern them. In other words whether we can recognise the normative constraints of a certain situation or state of affairs depends on what features of that situation we are attuned to by our enculturation. One mode of enculturation will attune us to certain morally salient features of a situation, but miss others; another mode of upbringing will attune us to a different set. Cross-cultural or intersubjective exchanges then become a matter of pointing out what features of a situation one finds morally salient and listening to what the other finds morally salient in the same situation, thus such intercultural interchange can expand our moral horizons. This avoids the pitfalls of cultural relativism whilst paying culture its dues and it avoids the pitfalls of ethical universalism whereby we assume that there is only one warranted ethical take on the world – felicitously it just happens to be our own ethical take on the world that is the one warranted take. (As a side note; such a view predominates in the current Anglo-American political climate which has, unfortunately in my view, rendered the notion of freedom a dirty word, or at least one that I am increasingly ashamed to use).[11]

What about secularism? Lets consider how this feeds into the idea of the disenchantment of nature by returning to the two epistemic views already mentioned. From the perspective of the naturalist, the perspective of modern Science, nature is a realm governed by law-like causal interactions and from this realm the notion of *sui generis* meaning is excluded.[12] Furthermore it is usual for those who hold to this view to construe those who challenge it as desiring some kind of

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[9] Ibid, quoting McDowell, 202.
[10] Ibid, 202.
[11] Although I think that my understanding of that term diverges somewhat from the understanding of George W. Bush, the mismatch between these conceptions cannot really be explored here.
[12] R Bernstein: *McDowell's domesticated Hegelianism*, London, 2003, 16-17.

anachronistic return to the pre-modern superstitious enchanted view of nature.[13] Those who take nature as a realm of meaning can be seen as working against science. McDowell's position is not to deny the importance of the scientific notion of nature but to suggest that if we limit our conception of nature thus, we are led into thinking about things in terms of unhelpful dichotomies (Appendix 1). For there is no place for meaning in the realm of law, any meaning that we perceive in it is just a blanket thrown over the world by the human mind desperate to come to terms with its own physical and cognitive finitude.

Now if we follow McDowell on this, we are led to something instructive about Kantian philosophy which McDowell's book gives us occasion to think about. Before I discuss this, let me just say that in both analytic and continental philosophy, Kant is commonly seen as the point of divergence for the two schools. There are two ways of reading Kant: one can focus on the first critique, which essentially establishes a system of epistemic warrant for empirical experience whereby the latter is equated with the realm described by Newtonian science. On this view Kant's major contribution is to epistemology and the philosophy of science, which, after transformations and revisions stacked on transformations and revisions, feeds into the modern analytic school with its strong emphasis on science.[14] Alternatively one can take a path out of Kant which focuses on the second and third critiques, a path taken by post-Kantian thinkers, focusing on: ethics as first philosophy, the notion of transcendental freedom, and the way judgment bridges the gap between nature and the transcendental freedom which grounds Kantian ethics.[15] Taking this path, again after transformations and revisions stacked on transformations and revisions, feeds into the modern continental tradition.[16]

Returning to McDowell, central to the Kantian view is a strong dichotomy between nature and freedom. For McDowell Kant uncritically accepted the idea of a disenchanted nature.[17] This is what empirical experience presents us, nature as a realm of law, a

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[13] Ibid.
[14] S Critchley: *Continental Philosophy: A very short introduction*, Oxford, 2001, 16-19.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Bernstein, op cit, 17.

spatio-temporal web of law like causal interactions. This is all that we can encounter in experience; it is all that we can know empirically. But for Kant there is also a transcendental dimension. Kant claims that autonomy is the supreme principle of morality,[18] yet the notion of autonomy cuts against the deterministic picture of the Newtonian world and so Kant is forced into the distinction between the empirical and the transcendental whereby empirically we are purely determined – and this is all we are warranted to know but despite this cognitive limitation, we must postulate that transcendentally we are free and autonomous. This creates a distinction between the empirical subject, bound by the laws of science and so fully determined, and the rational subject who is transcendentally free and thus morally autonomous.

This feeds into a distinction between morality and legality, creating an ethical gap between the rational subject and the laws of the state. For Kant the state is the realm in which the law operates; the law achieves its end, the regulation of society, through the exercise of legitimate authority, through compulsion and coercion. It achieves its ends by appealing to the conative side of human nature: if you desire to live without pain, avoid breaking the law; if you break the law, the state can legitimately exercise is coercive authority over you. The law, for Kant, is set up as a system of causal push and pull – much like the realm of Newtonian science. The law is objectively codified and it is the instrument of an objective authority, the state. From the perspective of the law what is of interest is whether a citizen acts according to the law; it focuses on the external action of citizens. On the other hand morality, the determination and pursuit of the good life, is not the business of the state. Morality is the business of the subject and it is radically internal; if motivations for doing right are moral motivations then they have their origin purely in the reflections of the subject who sees that a certain course of action is morally obligatory. Nothing guarantees that morality and legality will be in harmony; the state demands obedience to law, morality demands that I am true to an inner principle. There is a radical distinction between the inner realm of the rational subject and the external realm of the law. The law can compel me to act in a certain way but cannot compel me to believe in a certain way. Particularly, it cannot compel me to believe something is good when I in fact do not.

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[18] H Allison: *Idealism and Freedom*, Cambridge, 1996, 134.

Thus morality is the realm of individual freedom of conscience. Kant is pursuing religious tolerance through freedom of conscience and, theory aside, the background to this is firstly Kant's own Pietistic upbringing, but also a response to the religious wars of the seventeenth century. Yet, *qua* philosophical doctrine, all this rests upon the idea that one can differentiate oneself into the rational subject, or the self *qua* inner being which is a self legislator, and an empirical subject, or the self *qua* outer being which must act in accordance with positive law. Thus in Kant the sphere of authority that is given to the state and legality is the empirical realm of objectivity, but the sphere of authority that is given to morality is the inner realm of rational subjectivity. The state can only regulate law and its institutional manifestations; it has no say in what an individual ought to determine is good, and it should avoid any institutional association with determination of the good life. The church is focused on the transcendental realm, it is focused on the good, and can develop conceptions of the good life, but it has no legitimate coercive power and cannot compel anyone to accept its take. Thus religious association or disassociation is left to the inner sphere of the rational subject to determine according to conscience. The individual must determine whether they accept a certain conception of the good life or reject it in favour of another, or even perhaps suspend their judgment about it.

Note how this distinction is in harmony with contemporary Anglo-American liberal thinkers, particularly those who are influenced by Kant, like John Rawls and perhaps also Martha Nussbaum. Take this quote from the Rawlsian political thinker, Will Kymlicka:

> According to Rawls, liberals have simply extended the principle of tolerance to other controversial questions about meaning, value and the purpose of human life… But if liberalism can indeed be seen as an extension of the principle of religious tolerance, it is important to recognise that religious tolerance in the West has taken a specific form – namely the idea of individual freedom of conscience.[19]

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[19] W Kymlicka: *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Introduction*, Oxford, 2002, 230.

Thus, a fundamental tenet of liberalism, one that I think we see decaying before our eyes, is that a government ought to have no substantive take on the good life but rather ought to let the individual determine their own conception of it (so long as this does not impinge upon other people's pursuit of their own conception of the good life). The state has legitimate coercive power in so far as such coercion is necessary to ensure the freedom of each in harmony with the freedom of all. The state is the only institution with such coercive power over citizens; other institutions can have a take on the good life but they have no coercive power. Morality, a discourse on the good and the good life, is relegated to the sphere of 'individual freedom of conscience.'[20] What an individual is willing to accept as good is left to them. All the state can do is try to develop the external or empirical conditions conducive to the pursuit of the good life – by securing certain primary goods needed to pursue the good life, but especially through the establishment of a constitution that facilitates 'individual freedom of conscience.'[21]

Two quick points on this: that liberalism resonates with elements of Protestantism ought not be at all surprising given the context in which it develops. One need only look at the foundational liberal theorists studied by undergraduates in political philosophy to see this – Hobbes, Locke, and more problematically Rousseau (who began as a Protestant, converted to Catholicism and then reconverted to Protestantism). Later of course they will probably go on to study Kant, and, of course, the philosopher who has been dubbed the Protestant Aquinas; Hegel. This led to one of my Canadian students commenting that in Anglo-American contexts, political philosophy was better described as the history and philosophy of liberalism. Secondly, to return to the throwaway line above where I said that the notion that a government ought to have no substantive take on the good, is currently decaying before our eyes.[22] I think that the reason for the decay lies in the problematic nature of the relation between mind and world, subject and object, inner and outer and particularly

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[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Here I am thinking of the emergence in America of the New Christian Right as a force in politics, but also to the presidency of George W Bush, a convert to evangelical Christianity. Both seek to bring 'traditional values,' or a thick conception of the good life back into the political and into a more direct dialogue with the government's legislative wing. That success here has been limited has probably been more a factor of institutional limitations.

the idea that legality and morality can, somehow, be kept separate (Appendix 1). I think that the decay is an indication that we are moving off from flawed presuppositions and artificial distinctions that make sense in the abstract but are inadequate to the real.

Of course the American Declaration of Independence owes more to the Anglo-Protestant tradition than it does to the Germano-Protestant tradition. It begins from an atomistic conception of the human being, from what Taylor describes as 'disembedded individuals who come to associate together, each, in pursuing his of her own purpose in life, acts to benefit others.'[23] It is based in a conception of human nature whereby human beings, *qua* created beings, *qua* God's creatures, were seen as created equal and also to be the possessors of inalienable, God given, rights.[24] But in so far as the individual so conceived was the basis of the declaration we can understand the declaration as a document which aims to found a moral order established by God.[25] To me all of this seems to refer us more to Locke than any other major political thinker in the Anglo tradition. Yet as Taylor points out '[w]hen this plan was understood as providential and the moral order seen as natural law, which is the law of God then building a society that fulfils these requirements was seen as fulfilling the design of God … The fundamental idea that America had a vocation to carry out God's purposes has to be understood in relation to the conception of an order of free, rights bearing individuals.'[26]

With growing disenchantment and the changing nature of American society, this picture is rendered problematic. There is still a sense that America is founded on the notion of some universal moral order, this is, pure and simple, America's 'great' contribution to modern political life – a conception of itself as the embodiment of a universal moral order. But for many Americans, this moral order can now no longer be providential in nature, rather it must by grounded on some other principles: for instance, some unchallengeable *a priori* principles which are, apparently, universalisable. Thus many contemporary American liberal thinkers are led back to some kind of Kantian approach in an attempt to 'rescue the constitution from

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[23] C Taylor: *Varieties of Religion Today: William James revisited*, Cambridge, 2003, 67.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid.

God'[27] by anchoring it in universal reason. Just how much this rescues the constitution from God and how much it anchors the constitution in a non-metaphysical expression of Anglo-Protestant values is the decisive question.

Lets deepen this by returning to Kant by way of the early Hegel and consider one way that the Kantian distinction between morality and legality comes under fire. Hegel has a conception of community life as the bearer and sustainer of freedom and rationality.[28] Neither human rationality nor the notion of freedom are separable from the form of life in which any individual is embedded. We can feed Hegel's claim about rationality back into McDowell's thesis. If experience is always already conceptually structured, so that our experience brings with it a conceptual structure, then experience itself will provide us reasons, warrants or constraints to the way we **act**, what we **say**, and how we **judge**. But it is our life in our community, our social and historical context, that is going to orientate us to that experience in such a way as to facilitate our discovery of its conceptual features – and of course certain communities may orientate themselves differently. What features we strike upon thus determine the reasons we can give for saying or acting or judging the way we do.

Thus reason and rationality cannot be seen as some power divorced from the social; some transcendental capacity, but essentially social and historical and bound to our communal sense makings. So the idea that reason is universal in form and content seems false, rationality as a capacity might be universal in distribution but in terms of its content, it is particular. Now the level of social or political freedom that a community achieves depends upon what conceptual features a community is orientated towards. Kant is right to link freedom to rationality the way that he has, but he is wrong to think of reason as something transcendent – rather it is embedded in forms of life.

But now the social institutions of the church and the state cannot be differentiated the way Kantian political philosophy differentiates them, because the distinction between the rational and empirical subjects

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[27] Ibid, 70.
[28] H S Harris, translator, *Hegel's Development: Towards the Sunlight*, Oxford, 1972,170.

has collapsed. The empirical subject is rational and embedded in a realm that is always already conceptual and therefore a realm that always already carries reasons. Thus there cannot be such a radical distinction between the moral and the legal and so in order to organise political life: in order to structure the legal, one has to have recourse to the moral; legality has to orientate itself according to the values of the community. Also because the political realm facilitates practical activity, it must also help in the cultivation of the individuals within it. It helps to orientate them to their experience and it is always already attuning them to morally salient facts. Thus the moral and the legal are always bound together; the legal receives its orientation from the features of the world that the society as a form of life finds morally salient and through its social role the legal helps to educate those who are born into or enter that form of life to what is morally salient within it and thus provides moral continuity.

The distinction between the rational and the empirical subject is artificial, the distinction between the moral and the legal is artificial and the distinction between the mind and the world is artificial. All of this needs to be overcome, not necessarily rejected, what is necessary is that we give up the simplistic distinctions and deepen our thinking about these issues. I am certainly not urging a return to notions of unitary Christendom, nor am I urging that we give up on the idea of religious and cultural pluralism, nor saying that the political and the religious must be bed partners. What I am saying is that we need to rethink the whole contrivance, from the ground up.

Now McDowell's thoughts can be deepened through looking at the form of life that gives rise to this problematic picture in its pre-philosophical manifestations. Philosophy does not happen in a vacuum, it emerges out of a life world that is its precondition and one of the interesting facets of post-Kantian idealism is that it has, at an abstract level, an interest in the historical origins of philosophical predicaments; it attends to the kinds of attitudes that give rise to the kind of problematic picture that McDowell discusses. It is my contention that a whole series of problematic distinctions, dualisms or dichotomies emerge out of the Judeo-Christian conceptual grid. These distinctions are based in the way we 'think' our world. This constrains us to move in certain directions, to do certain things, to say certain things and to judge things in certain ways. These distinctions, through this normative constraint, seem to set us on a certain

trajectory, which, whilst those distinctions are held to, seem almost unavoidable in the same way that McDowell tells us that if we buy a certain picture of the relation of the mind to the world, we get caught in an interminable oscillation between naturalism and coherentism.

I think that McDowell is correct, but I think that the distinction that he makes between mind and world is founded upon a prior distinction between self and world, or to make the point more distinctive, between self and nature. This distinction has been carried from our religious tradition into our intellectual tradition and from our intellectual tradition into our social institutions, but if the original distinction is problematic and flawed then we are in trouble. I contend that it is flawed. I contend that the original distinction is based in a form of self-alienation, a fractured or schizoid view of the self that has led us into fractured and schizoid intellectual moves and social institutions. So let us now explore the basis of this through the early Hegel on fate and spirit. I will work with these early accounts not because they are fully representative of Hegel's mature view but, firstly and foremost, because I think that one can get a more radical reading out of the social and political thinking of the early Hegel. Indeed the latter Hegel seems to argue that Protestantism is an end point for socio-religious development because it has most adequately grasped and realised the principle of freedom. Now whilst they do not necessarily receive this idea from Hegel, I would suggest that many Anglo-American politicians also hold the same convictions about it, so the views of the latter Hegel are more in harmony with the attitude I am criticising. Lastly I will focus on the early Hegel's writings because they are accessible to the non-specialist and take us as far as I think we need go for the purposes of this paper.

Hegel's interest in fate is directed to the fate of social groupings. For Hegel the fate of a people is directly related to its spirit or *Geist*, which if you understand it correctly, is to say that the fate of a people is directly related to its form of life. A rudimentary outline of a theory of spirit or *Geist* is present in his earliest writings where the term *Geist* is used to describe the self-consciousness of a community. In particular the term is used in reference to modalities of thought and action in which a community becomes conscious of its own particularity *qua* community.[29] Hegel tells us that the spirit of a

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[29] Ibid, 273.

people is the nexus of its history, religious and political life, each of which are peculiar ways through which a community can relate to itself, or be conscious of itself without being conscious that this is what is occurring through them. Yet none of these alone are sufficient to be regarded as that people's Spirit, only the unity of the three.[30] Hegel tells us:

> The [S]pirit of a people <is> its history, its religion, the level of political freedom – [these things] cannot be treated separately either with respect to their mutual influence, or in characterising them [each by itself.][31]

Yet these modalities of social self-consciousness are not only the product of the communities' self-relation but also shape its thinking.[32] These three forms of community self-consciousness are grounded in a normative system that they, *qua* discourses, help to articulate whilst themselves being shaped by those norms. So the Spirit of a people is not only its history, political structure and religion but also simultaneously orientates its particular historical, political and religious outlook. Spirit is a way a community can think its self, but that form of thinking in itself shapes what is thought.

One must avoid thinking of this relationship, between a people and its Spirit, as a relationship between two particulars that are external to each other, as if the spirit of a people is something lying over and above that people. It is better understood as a relation of reciprocity and mutuality, neither part having ontological priority over its other. A people and its spirit come together as a living whole; without the activity of the parts the whole would not exist, and without the integration and orientation of the whole the parts would dissolve. Whilst it is theoretically possible to separate the elements for the purpose of abstract analysis, no actual separation can occur; a people cannot be considered separate from its spirit without destroying or killing its character as a people. It is this organic relation between a people and its Spirit that constitutes its mode of existence as **its** way of 'life'.

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[30] G W F Hegel: *The Tübingen Fragment of 1793*, in H S Harris, translator, *Hegel's Development: Towards the Sunlight*, Oxford, 1972, 506.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid*.*

As it develops this theory of Spirit becomes more explicitly attitudinal, more explicitly normative; a mode of comportment towards the world that defines for us how we ought to judge what we find, defining what matters and what does not. To express this in philosophical, language *Geist* becomes a system of normative constraints that to a large degree define the possibilities for self-relation and relation to other. Hence Hegel will say in *The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate* that 'The same spirit which had carried Abraham away from his kin led him through encounters with foreign peoples during the rest of his life; this was the spirit of self-maintenance in strict opposition to everything.'[33] Abraham is here characterised as a figure who adopts a certain orientation to the world, by breaking away from an old form of *Geist* and actively constituting a new one. What defines this new mode of *Geist*? The world for Abraham is something radically separate or other. This shapes Abraham's interaction with the world, his beliefs, his judgments and through this his actions.[34] It is an attitude that he bequeaths to his progeny and hence shapes their own attitudes and likewise it shapes their historical, political and religious self-consciousness. Spirit is thus a system of norms that define our relation to the world by orientating our judgments about it; it constrains, although it does not completely determine, our thinking by defining what are appropriate responses or judgments to make about that world.

Before I go on let me clarify what I mean here by normative constraint. I have used it above, but now I am saying that talk of *Geist* is in fact talk of normative constraints and so we need to be clear on this. I am not talking about some kind of strict cultural determinism. The term is used as a shorthand way of saying that one is constrained to say certain things, do certain things or make certain judgments about the world, through a conception of what one ought say, ought to do or ought to judge – which of course does not mean that one will in fact say, do or judge that way. For instance if someone extends the hand of friendship to me, I ought to extend mine back if I want to continue in friendly relations with that person; nothing forces me to do so, but I do feel the normative pull, the constraint, to do so when the hand is extended. Okay, so by normative I mean some obligatory force, but this could be resisted.

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[33] G W F Hegel: *The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate*, T M Knox (trans), in *Early Theological Writings,* Philadelphia, 1996, 185-6.
[34] Ibid.

Let me now say that what I mean when I discuss this kind of constraint is something even more particular; I am in fact talking about conceptual constraint – which if you have attended to what I have said about McDowell ought to prick a few ears. By this I mean that there are concepts whereby the mere possession of that concept gives me a reason for saying, doing or judging things in a particular way. Conceptual constraint is a compact way of saying that certain concepts are action guiding; the mere possession of the concept provides a reason for me to act, say or judge in particular way.[35] For instance A.W. Moore says that anyone who possesses the concept of blasphemy thereby has a reason not to blaspheme, unless of course they aim to undermine the status of that concept. Knowing what blasphemy is itself provides some normative constraints, some reason, that weighs against the practice of blaspheming.[36] Or, again from A.W. Moore, anyone who possesses the concept of a promise thereby has a reason for keeping them, unless of course they seek to undermine the institution of promising.[37] I think we get the picture. A norm is action-guiding but not action determining. Now if we accept McDowell's contention that experience is always already conceptually structured and that our upbringing attunes us to certain conceptual features of that experience, then we can see that in Hegelian terms experience is always already *Geistlich*, always already normative.

Now, to the subject of fate, Hegel uses fate in two senses. Firstly 'universal fate;' an impersonal force before which everything must yield.[38] This is essentially the power of nature and it is applied to all peoples in a relatively even handed way and so, at first, it does not seem to be able to generate particular cultural or community self-consciousness. For Hegel this absolute or universal fate is brought into relation with another sense of fate, particularistic fate. Particularistic fate is not impersonal, it is viewed as the product of a will, but nonetheless it is still naturalistic in that it is emptied of any supernatural elements. The ground of particularistic fate is a peoples' capacity for a relation to an 'other'. This is born from an encounter with an 'other' that simultaneously forces that people into

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[35] A W Moore: *Noble in Reason, Infinite in Faculty: Themes and variations in Kant's moral and religious philosophy*, London, 2003,39.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Harris, op cit*,* 273-4.

self-relation. The ground of the fate of any particular people is 'the genuine spiritual self-awareness of a people'[39] which can only arise through relation to an 'other'. Thus particularistic fate has its ground in the consciousness of the people itself for, without this kind of self-consciousness, this self-awareness in relation to an 'other,' fate would not arise.

This 'genuine spiritual self-awareness'[40] in relation to an 'other,' emerges as part of a twofold process. The first step in this process is a sense of a breach with nature conceived as an impersonal force, a sense that we are able to lose ourselves from the 'deterministic' forces of universal fate. The nascent social 'we,' or in the case of Abraham the individual, begins to see itself as something apart from the realm of nature, not entirely subject to universal fate. For Hegel this is generally the result of an experience whereby what was once hospitable and homely suddenly presents itself as inhospitable and unhomely. Perhaps the world with which we once identified and saw as being hospitable to our plans, suddenly presents itself in such a way that we can no longer judge it to be so – we are suddenly orientated to new facets of its conceptual structure. Though, whilst there is this separation or breach with nature, the people or the individual simultaneously views itself as, at least in part, subject to its now inhospitable force or open to its influence.

On this view of the world, nature is a blind system that operates without regard for human needs, in so far as 'we' are **in** nature, we can be subject to its push and pull, but because 'we' also see ourselves as something apart from nature, or separate from it, we are able to resist this push and pull. This breach is a product of consciousness, a breach in thought, but this breach in thought is taken to be a real breach. It is rendered metaphysical. Ultimately this breach is a form of self-alienation, the human being, *qua* natural being, denies that it is natural and instead posits that what is essential to it is something non-natural, supernatural. I think that one of the greatest failures of modern philosophical imagination is the seeming inability to see the human being, and the world for that matter, as entirely natural and yet still as spiritual – so deeply have we associated spirituality with transcendence and 'God' that we can no longer view the world as anything but a purely material thing and

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[39] Ibid, 274.
[40] Ibid.

conversely we cannot see ourselves as spiritual apart from a relation to 'God'. So instead of seeing the world as both a system of causal relations and a system of meaning the notion of meaning is jettisoned. Hegel and McDowell in different ways seem to urge us to break with this. I agree.

By itself this way of conceiving our relation to nature is not sufficient for the production of the kind of self-awareness that typifies spirit; such self-awareness comes 'only when [the people in question] deliberately adopt towards other *peoples* the attitude that they have reactively adopted towards the revealed might of universal fate.'[41] Thus other peoples are taken to be entirely part of the system of universal impersonal fate; entirely part of nature. Thus the attitude that we take towards nature as a purely impersonal and inhospitable force we extend to other peoples, they are other (*Anderssein*). Again this originates in consciousness, it is a product of reflection, it is a breach in thought and again it is a form of self-alienation, a form of violence done by consciousness to itself. It is humanity dividing itself against itself.

This distinction between our people and all others, is merely a distinction in thought. It is an abstraction, but it has been rendered a metaphysical distinction. It is here that 'genuine spiritual self-consciousness' arises, this is the birthplace of the spirit of a people – the voluntary or willed breach with the rest of humanity by identifying them with the world and ourselves with something outside of it. We chose to understand them in the same terms that we understand nature. Thus this breach is the product of a will and not something impersonal. It is the character or attitude of the latter voluntary breach that determines the fate of the people that creates that breach, but it ought to be recognised that the character of that voluntary breach is itself determined by our reaction to the initial breach with nature[42] and is merely an extension of that breach. Thus, the attitude towards nature, our orientation to nature, is extended to other human beings to become a form of life, a way of relating to self and other and so the fate of a people is itself determined by the norms governing their forms of life.

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[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.

Now we must note something about this breach with nature, we must note the attitude that comes with it. In Abraham's willed breach with nature, nature becomes an inhospitable, unruly other which threatens the very existence of Abraham *qua* subject. So, Hegel tells us:

> Mastery was the only possible relationship in which Abraham could stand to the infinite world opposed to him; but he was unable himself to make this mastery actual, and he therefore remained ceded to his ideal. He himself also stood under his Ideal's dominion, but the idea was present in his mind, he served the idea, and so he enjoyed his Ideal's favour; and since its divinity was rooted in his contempt for the whole world, he remained its only favourite.[43]

But what is the idea to which Hegel is here alluding? The Idea, whose Ideal is the Judeo-Christian God, is the result of viewing the entirety of the world 'outside' of subjectivity as hostile to the 'inner' life of the subject.[44] Now this is just a judgment about the world that we live in and does not move that far beyond what is given in experience except to say that what is given in experience is a world hostile to the subject. But if the outer was hostile to the inner, then the subject was in a state of complete insecurity so the outer had to be mastered[45] – this leads to the Idea or thought of 'the mastery of nature,' and, transforming this abstract idea into an ideal, we are led to the master/mastered relation wherein the master (God) must be somehow distinct from or alien to what is mastered (nature). This notion of the mastery of nature is in fact a product of thought that arises out of a particular view of nature (as a hostile other), this thought of the mastery of nature is not something that Abraham can experience through his own powers; he cannot in fact master nature, and so it is transformed into the thought-ideal of the Judeo-Christian God who **is** seen as sufficient to that idea. This thought-ideal is ontologised, and becomes the thought of an actual individual and concrete being God.[46]

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[43] G W F Hegel: *The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate*, in T M Knox (trans), in *Early Theological Writtings,* Philadelphia, 1996, 187.
[44] Ibid*,* 182-3.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid*,*183.

This breach with nature is in my opinion the original fracture on which the subsequent fractures are built. At a cosmological level it result in a schizoid metaphysics; a divided universe, whereby on one side we have nature which is merely a bounded, finite and impersonal system and on the other side we have spirit which is unbounded and infinite, personalised through the notion of God. Where does that peculiar mode of being we call humanity fit into this picture? Well, closer to God than to nature. But how is this so when it seems as if we are much like animals and other natural products? Well, yes we are natural bodies that are objective just like other natural products, but we also know ourselves to be subjects. Surely this inner realm of subjectivity lies closer to that which is separate from nature, closer to God than to nature.

Nature is bounded by law, hence the body is bounded by law, but *qua* subjects we are transcendentally free and so capable of seeking out the good. When this kind of picture is taken up into our intellectual tradition, when it is abstracted and turned into an intellectualised picture of the relation of subject to object, mind to world, we are led down a path that leads through the history of modern philosophy, but part of the history of philosophy is the history of political philosophy and so this picture cannot but haunt our thinking about the social and the political, and the institutions that reflect political life, which always emerge from the way we understand our relation to our world; always the expression of *Geist*. In order to discover the fate of secularism we need to attend firstly to this problematic picture, based in fracture, but secondly we have to attend to the normative constraints that come with this fracture, we have to attend to the way it orientates us to the world, and see how it constrains our thoughts, our words, our deeds, our theories, our institutions and our relations to other peoples.

McDowell talks about an interminable oscillation in epistemic theory between naturalism and coherentism, but we are also caught in the tension between God and Nature; as the organising principle of our life worlds, these two categories are always at play within our social, intellectual and institutional lives. Perhaps God dominates the picture and the natural is minimised. Perhaps the natural dominates and God is minimised. But when our emphasis on one side starts to decay, we seem constrained to fall back upon its other. Secularism was born out of a Judeo-Christian view of the world; it is born within

this fracture. In its contemporary manifestation it seems to have overcome a worldview where social, cultural and political pluralism was preserved through religious universalism (written at the institutional rather than the local level) – crudely, pre-reformation Europe. However, modern secularism has sought social and political unity through promoting religious plurality, but in order to preserve religious pluralism it seems as if we now have to universalise the political – the universalisation of liberal democratic political theory, a process that the Anglo-American world seems to have taken up with an almost religious zeal, at least since the 1950's but which seems to be a strong element in contemporary Anglo-American foreign policy. So, and here I will end, perhaps contemporary Anglo-American political life is the result of such a fractured relation to the world, and perhaps the fate of secularism is the universalisation of America, the New Jerusalem – the new City of God.

APPENDIX 1

Table of Fracture

Mind	World
Subject	Object
Master	Mastered
Self	Other
Normative	Natural
Culture (nurture)	Biology/Genetics (nature)
Particular	Universal
Cultural Relativism	Ethical Universalism
Communitarianism	Liberalism
Meaning	Science
Internalism	Externalism
Rational Self	Empirical Self
Morality	Legality
Private	Public
Church	State
Divine	Secular
God	Nature