

Editorial Preface to James Doull's "Secularity and Religion" ¹

James Doull's response to Hegel's account of Western culture and history stands in striking contrast to that of Feuerbach, Marx, Nietzsche and their recent progeny. For the latter, the refutation of Hegel and everything he represented — the Christian West itself, indeed — was thought absolutely necessary were a new neo-enlightenment or post-modernist world to come about. Doull on the contrary fully embraced Hegel's account of his own time as marking the consummation of a Christian-European cultural history whose meaning lay in the will to realize its core idea of freedom; a consummation which, however, at once signaled the decline of the older Euro-Christian national cultures with the emergence of a world-historical mentality making freedom itself its explicit basis.

Throughout his career Doull kept close vigil, as it were, on the unfolding of this latter world, both in its political and philosophical aspects, holding fast all the while to the Hegelian insight. This perspective permits of a thinking within post-modern philosophical and political positions which is at the same time objective and not committed to them. The following essay, hitherto unpublished, dates from 1973 when, after two world wars, questions concerning the cold war, presidential scandals in the U.S. and the prospects of the European Union were in the ascendancy. Doull here reflects on the question of secularism and anti-secularism, arguing as against both Marxism and the anti-secularism of the cultural right, that separation of church and state is by no means exclusive of either, is an entirely Christian innovation, and indeed the essential condition of a political order founded on freedom.

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Secularity And Religion

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I

If one attempt to say anything scientifically of secularity or secular cultures in relation to religion there occurs at once the difficult question to what science it belongs to speak of these matters. For the same phenomena are generally seen very differently from one side and the other. What to religion appears a lapse from the highest human concerns to the secondary or indifferent is seen by the secular as human liberation and a more serious concern for humanity. Nor does it help to take up the neutrality of a science of religions or from the other side of a sociology which treated religion as a social phenomenon. For what the negation of religion is would in the one case be examined as it belongs to religion, in the other case as a social phenomenon. But the question is of the relation of the two forms - religion and secular society - and can only fall to a science whose object is somehow both.

If there is such a science its standpoint would have to be that religion and secular society are primarily one and the same and that their difference and antagonism fall within that unity. Historically such a view of the matter has no doubt been far more prevalent than the opposite. That laws and social institutions are of a religious nature and not simply the product of experience and reflection is the common belief of peoples. That the secular order is independent of religion has only been definitely held by Greeks and Romans in the decline of their religions and in Christian times.

It is also a conspicuous and recurrent phenomenon that where a separation of secular society from religion has occurred neither remains unmixed but tends to pass into the other. When Plato sought to give Greek institutions a rational foundation he did not stay with scientific thought as this is usually taken but brought to light how logically these institutions had depended on Greek religion. Christian theologians again have always borrowed from the philosopher of the day as though religion and the wisdom of the world had a common root. Indeed the more in Protestant Christianity this had been denied, and religion set apart from science and philosophy, the more complete has been the assimilation of religion to secular life. Marxism again, which takes itself to be wholly done with religion, describes itself as the fulfillment of religion or as having obliterated the difference between religion and secularity.

A scientific consideration of these questions would have to explain no less the old and common belief that religion and secular institutions were not separate but of a piece than their separation and mutual hostility in classical and modern cultures. But equally the contemporary phenomenon would demand explanation that their unity is again sought whether in radical politics or in the turning of Christian religion from its former intellectuality to nature and immediacy.

The Hegelian philosophy takes account of these complex and contradictory phenomena and treats them methodically according to the same principles. It regards with unequaled objectivity the cultures of the Far East where practical life is not as an independent whole separated from religion, the classical world where this separation takes place, the subsequent conflicts of church and state, religion and secular life, in Christian times. Its first interest is not any of these forms as such but their relation and mutual dependence. For if the completest form is that in which the secular is most independent of religion and yet most embodies its religious belief in its secular institutions, just this form is most in need of oriental immediacy to sustain itself.

It has therefore freed itself from the common prejudices and preferences of the age of European domination in which it originated. It is indeed free also of the prejudice latent in the usual scientific study of these matters, that it studies other religious and cultural forms from a scientific and practical attitude of recent European origin. As against this the Hegelian philosophy knows how to correct the subjective distortions the modern investigator imposes on his object. For the root of this scientific prejudice in the investigation of cultural and religious phenomena is that the scientific interest arises especially where the historical struggle of religious and secular freedom has subsided - where particular interests and private life have become independent of these total interests. But this attitude is itself inimical to the understanding of religious and cultural totalities. Philosophically it tends to be an open empiricism to which such totalities are suspect. But the alternative is to stay with an indefinite number of perspectives into which the phenomena can be analysed, from which the investigator chooses according to his personal inclinations. This has first to be recognized and grasped as a particular way of regarding cultural and religious phenomena - itself a totality among others.

The Hegelian method assumed, how it can unite and render intelligible phenomena generally left discrete will be indicated in some cases of particular contemporary interest. The prevalent forms of secularity at the present time are no doubt American liberalism and Marxism. These are not generally thought to fall within the scope of the Hegelian philosophy. Marxists trace their origin in part to Hegel but for them the Hegelian philosophy is a matter of history. Its connection with American and British thought is with an abstract, idealistic period which is likewise a matter of history. But in neither case does this historical verdict rest in a knowledge more than superficial of the Hegelian philosophy. Nor by their own resources do either American liberalism or Marxism appear to have hold of what they are in other than a fragmented and dogmatic way. More perilous is the failure of either to give more than a caricature of its competitor for world domination.

II

The only society that can be thought purely secular is that of the Roman Empire, unless so far as Hellenistic Greeks had already come to the same principle. In other societies there either was not a subjective or self-consciousness which was to itself the unity of its technical, practical, and theoretical relations to nature or this human independence was itself taken into a religious attitude. The rational individuality or personality, which was the principle of this society, is a radical separation of humans from the passivity and dependence of an immediate unity with nature. It carries to its extreme consequence the freedom of Hebraic and Hellenic society which regard nature as derivative, dependent and ordered by divine subjectivity. This freedom and unity of ends is seen as belonging also to human activity. The harsh discipline of the Republic, the subordination in the words of a Roman of all other vices to the lust for state power, provoked in reaction an individuality which related to itself the whole extant of private interests - the equivalent in those conditions of a liberal reaction to puritanical suppression.

The old Roman religion which saw as divine what could give effect to particular human ends and especially the advancement of the Republic, can remain only so far as this society is not fully conscious of its principle. For this principle may be looked at positively in the manner of the Stoics as giving a universal end to which all particular ends can be related. In this case the old gods can be represented as powers within a universal teleology. But equally it has the negative or Epicurean form in which individuals have set themselves apart from all natural or limited involvements. For that view, if there be gods, they cannot be less than such self-related individuals and are therefore not the gods of popular religion who promote human desires, ambitions or collective love of power.

The complete form of the principle is however the scepticism for which there stands on the one side a plurality of endlessly open and incomplete relations to the world, on the other a detached rational subjectivity without content. Between the two no logical bond can be found. The world of the ancient sceptic is in general the same as that of modern empiricism, so far as this has purged itself of extraneous elements with equal vigor. But the modern liberal or socialist is moved altogether differently than the ancient sceptic. His open, pluralistic world is a field for always more specialized research, for ever closer technical and practical control. To the ancient this response is unthinkable: progressive research and more obviously technocratic control suppose a unity of ends not, as with personality, altogether abstract but able to penetrate the multiple and divided interests.

The Romans did indeed discover a science by which a certain regulation of all interests and activities was possible. Roman law or abstract right determines the rights of persons in relation to property and to one another. It appears therefore to be beyond the sceptical division of persons from the uncertain world of particular interests. But it is rather the authentic scepticism which can deal with the puzzle whether the sceptic can know that he cannot know. For by imposing a uniformity and objectivity on property and personal

relations, it brings to light that rights only attach in an unstable and contradictory way to persons as atomic individuals, that personality is rather that in which individuals are one and universal.

It is only if one supposes that this reduction of atomic individuality to universal self-consciousness has somehow been completed that liberal or socialist societies are in any way comprehensible. For they are not founded on race or any other natural bond but on the equality of their members, that is on rationality in which alone they are equal. But neither do they stay with the abstract independence of individuals and their indifference to common social interests. One has instead societies whose members are thought to carry out a common work through their various and divided occupations, in general or to a tolerable degree to satisfy their special interests and at the same time to act morally or in view of their common rationality.

How this reduction and transformation came about is in no way explicable unless the idea of a concrete subjectivity somehow entered the minds of people and then somehow also was made the form of their social and political organization. If the idea became general through the Christian religion, liberal and socialist societies established themselves rather through the rejection of this religion. But again not only to capitalistic liberalism but to anarchistic revolutionaries of Marxist inspiration Christians accommodate themselves and see their religion fulfilled in these works. If in some way modern secular forms have their origin in the Christian religion, it is no less the case that the religion itself has been radically altered by these secularities. At least in some cases these alterations of secular provenance are furthermore said by theologians not to be corruptions of the religion but rather to render it more Christian. Thus Protestants saw it a restoration to original purity when the religion was, for example in Calvinism, approached through modern rather than medieval forms of thought.

Such an interaction of religion and secular forms where against religion there arise independent and total secularities which are also taken to express the religion and to make it better known to its believers is not to be explained unless at least this religion and its secular progeny are both one and radically separate. There is present both the separation of all the finite from subjectivity, which was the Roman secularity, and also the unity of the two - and that on both the religious and the secular side.

The chief point, without which the relations of the Christian religion to the secularities of Christian times are in no way intelligible, is that this religion arose out of the consciousness of total separation of human and divine, secular and sacred, and retains this moment of separation in it. So far as this separation is not present and then seen as also overcome there is a deficient knowledge of the religion among its adherents. But that deficiency is inevitable so far as the religion remains in the form of religion proper and does not give rise to secular forms in which separation, rejection, revolt is actual and not merely presented in cult to the religious imagination.

The deficiency is inevitable because, more explicitly in this than in other religions, religion belongs to the individual primarily as universal or as thinking, and is only

derivatively in the form of language, imagination, symbol or whatever else. In virtue of its origin in the complete rationality of ancient secularity the need and the impulse to know what is believed is not an extraneous curiosity but intrinsic to the religion. The religion itself therefore generates revolt against an ecclesiastical order whose function it is to present and teach the religion in its more accessible but deficient forms. At first this revolt is theoretical or as philosophical reflection on the belief. So far, it can be contained in monastic orders of one kind or another. But as the passivity and obedience of a thought which is directed to a given or revealed content weakens, the more thought finds the essential logical structure of the belief.

The rational subjectivity which the Christian religion awakens against the intention of its clergy cannot be confined to the monastic cell or to the controlled secular labours of teaching orders. The need to go from this to independent secularity is internal to the religion and therefore unable to be suppressed by ecclesiastical power. For the moment of finite independence or secularity, without which whoever believes the religion has the dissatisfaction of not having proper hold on his belief, is not adequately present either in philosophical contemplation or in secular work that remains primarily under the form of authority and obedience and permits subjective freedom only within prescribed limits. The irrepressible need is there to go over to a secularity which is itself complete and separate from ecclesiastical regulation. And the religious belief itself is known more adequately and acceptably to the extent that it has been given external existence in the form of institutions whose essential structure is that of the belief. For there is then accessible to the believer a proof of his religion from historical experience of quite other solidity than arguments from the order of nature or from books assumed to be divinely revealed.

III

American liberalism is a particular form of Christian secularity. In this perspective at once the remarkable energy and stability of the system can be understood and its dangers and limits. Otherwise considered, it is a baffling and contradictory phenomenon which gives rise to a number of mutually exclusive philosophical positions which to an external view are none the less characteristically American. It can be given abstractly an idealistic form and a naturalistic, or both forms can appear together in a pragmatism which relates them variously without disclosing an original unity.

Whether and in what sense American liberalism remains attached to the Christian religion cannot be stated simply. In one way this religion continues to be a popular force and has not become merely residual as commonly in Europe. But again in those less intellectual sections of the public where it most flourishes it is also most readily identified with a conservative capitalism radically secular in its origin and character. If Christianity again is taken to be rather akin to the liberal left, the alliance hardly outlasts a negative stage where the left is only a protest. But by itself without these secular aids the religion

shifts uneasily between mere subjective feeling without definitive belief and doctrine and a belief and doctrine without subjective freedom.

To an impartial and objective view American liberalism is all these secular and religious elements and what unites, distinguishes and opposes them to one another. This is more plainly seen in the general public than where the habit of academic disciplines has hardened the distinctions. Thus when a conservative President acts illegally for what, erroneously or not, he estimates to be the interests of the state, this gives offense to liberal opinion itself in revolt against the authority of abstract morality or law. A conservative censor of the President in the name of strict legality is applauded by anarchic youth. But what opposes President to Senator is perhaps a subjective religiosity to a religiosity rather of abstract law. And thus where the lower moral expectations of other peoples would learn nothing from crimes openly commanded by their rulers, the suspicion of Presidential crime awakens Americans and shows them the nature of their institutions.

These elements, religious and secular, are together the secularization of the older Protestantism. The Calvinism of Puritan America is allowed by historians to have had an extensive influence on its later history. Sociologists and theologians trace capitalism to the Protestant spirit or else deny this descent. But the connection is only vaguely seen until it is given the Hegelian form that Calvinism itself is not the Christian religion simply but as approached through the negation of medieval secularity. Medieval secularity was not as in Roman antiquity the abstract separation of personality from the particular or natural will. It was rather the unmediated relation of barbarians all too readily whole and concrete in their individuality to a religion which taught this same concreteness. In the course of feudal society and the subjection of the classes to the state this barbarous Christendom experienced the opposition of abstract subjectivity and the natural will. Protestantism is the unity of these terms of the totally depraved natural will, as it was described, and abstract personality in a subjectivity which knows itself as that unity or makes it its object through Christian doctrine and cult.

But this subjectivity is implicitly the same as the Cartesian 'cogito' and does not have its object in true form by its own measure as '*Vorstellung*' or imaginative thought or in reducing to rational consistency a presupposed scripture. A knowledge of itself in the form of thought is rather to be had through the structure of 'civil society' or capitalism where instead of an abstract opposition of good and evil and a negation of the opposition for feeling and imagination the evil, self-seeking competitive will becomes productive of goods and services towards the general well being. For capitalism is not simply the general will or the competitive will but rather the connection of the two in the innumerable ends of society a connection designated by such words as 'useful', 'beneficial to society'.

'Civil society' or 'capitalism', came into being by the following logical stages. First the relation of Protestant faith to the unity of human nature is simply rejected as inadequate to rational insight, 'enlightenment', 'deism' or whatever name one likes. Secondly this rational insight passes from merely critical activity which reduced Protestant theology to historical research to an inner development and the appropriation

of the content of 'faith' in a logically appropriate form. This development is first the distinction in rational insight between abstract self-consciousness and feeling B the immediacy of the universal will and of the natural will. Then what constituted the ancient secularity is developed as the relation and mediation of this distinction, so that here it is known as comprehended within the primary division of life, or nature, and thought.

In religious terms this first distinction gives the logical basis of an abstract moralism and a pietistic religion of feeling. These are combined in American liberalism with an uncompleted dialectic of particular and universal ends on the secular side proper. Because their mediation is not fully explicit, the religious forms recur. But they also easily pass into the secular and take their content from secular activities and forms of thought.

The stability of this society hangs on the satisfaction of its members with abstract religious forms on the one side and a pragmatic relation of individual and general goods on the other. They explicate imperfectly the concrete humanity known in the old Protestantism. And, secularly, advanced capitalism leaves ever less room to the individual to satisfy his particular interests independently and competitively. Its stability is threatened when some seek a concreter unity with nature than through technological control and others constitute themselves a technological bureaucracy and give the form of universality to the system of finite ends. For this is to break the pragmatic concreteness of life into its elements. Technological excesses may in particular cases be exposed and Presidential advisers disgraced. But the technological bureaucracy is an abstract response to the need for stronger unity and direction of the society and hardly to be contained.

The demand is present that the logic of 'civil society' be carried through to its conclusion, the concrete unity of nature and thought be brought to light and the system of means and private interests be subordinated to it. The great difficulty in the way of this, according to the argument, is that the forgotten religious basis of American liberalism would have to be reconsidered and given more adequate form.

IV

The other great contemporary secular form has not a general name. If it be called 'Marxism', that would be to neglect the peoples of the Common Market who are equally to be included. Philosophically those of an Existentialist tendency and Marxists are sometimes called in common post-Hegelian. But the argument here is that the standpoint from which both tendencies are to be understood is Hegelian, and that both are forms of a total secularization of the Christian religion without the residual attachments to the religion still present in American liberalism. The result of this as of other Christian secularities, would be according to the Hegelian argument also a deeper knowledge of the religion. But the course of that argument is opaque alike to Marxist and Existentialist.

When Feuerbach and Marx see the fulfillment of Christianity in a radical secularity complete and sufficient to itself, the phenomenon they describe can as well be seen as a

lapse into a Platonic cave from which independent subjectivity is not to be regained. One account is as good as the other. For to say that in communism state and civil society or the realm of particular interests are immediately one is no different than saying that they are immediately separate. Similarly the Roman secularity could be equally well described as the irreparable division of nature and reason and by Stoical writers as an immediate pantheistic unity of the two.

The phenomenon of total secularization had already occurred in the advanced European states and was described precisely by Hegel. What still occupies American liberalism the division of private and public interests in civil society became in a certain way a subordinate problem in these states. Whether in fact states regulated economic life greatly, the later emergence of socialist parties shows that such regulation was not incompatible with the national state. In these states there could not be a relation to the Christian religion in the American manner, that is through the incomplete development of civil society. If there were to be a relation it must rather be through the state. But how can a state which has in principle brought under its power the whole realm of private interests and is for its members the unity of ends point beyond itself to religion? To Hegel it was clear that once the state was well established it would cease to be Christian, in the sense that civil society would detach itself as a sphere complete in itself where religion and other principle matters would be seen in a finite context not very differently than in Roman antiquity. In one way the unity of civil society and state was established, in another way as the history of the 19th century testifies never were Europeans so free privately to extend their interests in every direction. To this separation Hegel saw the only and inevitable cure to be war, which would in the end be the destruction of national states impotent to be actually what they were in idea the power to unify private interests to the concrete good.

Marxists have had difficulty in showing how the secular unity of human interests is to be thought a practical end. If it were said that revolution sprang from the contradiction of advanced capitalism, then this unity was to be realized first in particular national states. But the dissolution of an ordered distinction between state and society within a nation resembles rather what is called 'fascism'. Or if the state were thought to be simply for the welfare of its members in their particular interests the welfare state this was rather to atomize than to unite society.

If one thought rather of world revolution in response to international capitalism or 'imperialism', it must at least incipiently be of one or some peoples and not of all. Partly therefore the same difficulty recurs as for revolution in one nation, partly the further difficulty that as supranational communist power will be abstract disembodied humanity or rather its embodiment in a party. And so instead of the liberation of society one finds after a half century bureaucratic oppression centred in a people of autocratic tradition, and the revolution maintained among other peoples by military power. In one case the communist state confines civil society by a wall. In another it permits flight to the United States.

But it also happens that Marxism unites society and state among peoples long moribund and powerless against foreign domination. European and American technology are found powerless against the Marxism of China or Vietnam. It thus appears that the undivided will of society and state is after all a reality and not either the fanaticism of national solidarity or the ever unrealized human ideal of a state technology.

For the dialectical barbarism that neglected to notice that the unity of state and society in its modern form is not simply immediate, nor its mediation simply historical, material, economic. Marxists have paid the price that they cannot account for these differences. The explanation is to be seen in this that the unity of society and state is more and less difficult according to the depth or concreteness of their antecedent separation. On the ground of an ancient culture where the separation of religion and secularity was only incipient, a pervasive universal subjectivity could animate the mass of society with quite other facility than in Europe.

Marxism again could subsist and find acceptance or toleration among the Russian people who had never historically experienced deeply the several Christian secularities. Among American liberals it can only take root in the form of anarchistic opposition to bureaucratic capitalism. In western Europe the relation is less obvious. Partly there appears a close affinity with Marxism in an Existentialist thought that, for example with Heidegger, would annul the deep division of classical and Christian thought from nature and Asiatic immediacy. Why might they not meet in 'Maoism'? But it is just the subjective will in its abstractness nihilistic, Nietzschean which is one aspect of 'Maoism' that is most repugnant to that direction of thought. There is here a sundering of technocratic will from nature such that no mediation seems discoverable, where in American liberalism the connection is not altogether lost.

Objectively the European secularity is partly society on the basis of the national states, holding to the side of nature and particularity, which delegates power within uncertain limits to an international bureaucracy. Partly in the Marxist form the bureaucracy has independent power and restricts more or less severely the realm of particular freedom. The whole course of the argument has shown that the unity of both forms is the truth of the matter.

But the mediation by which that unity might be known is not to be found in European conditions but variously in awakening Asia, in liberal America, perhaps elsewhere as well. The relation of this secularity to liberal America has the curious form that in one way it is aware of having gone beyond this liberalism, in another it has lost even the imperfect unity there present. If one were to say that what is sought at the present time is a political will, also the will of society or of individuals, such as could use technical power towards the concrete human good, then the American secularity and the European are incapable of this will for opposite reasons. American liberalism knows this good only in religious form and its secular expression is only technology or the system of means. European secularity is concrete but the religious form is lost in which this concreteness can be known as such.

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