

## Article

# Jürgen Habermas's Translation of the Human Being as Created in the Image of God: Perspectives from Joseph Ratzinger and Alasdair MacIntyre

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**Abstract:** This paper considers Habermas's translation proviso, which requires religious concepts to be translated into secular language when in the public sphere. Translation, for Habermas, protects the state from religious interference and elicits essential aspects of pre-rational thought—that is, religious and metaphysical thought, which post-metaphysics cannot generate for itself, e.g., social solidarity. The task undertaken by Habermas's translation proviso is illustrated through his own work of translation: that of the translation of the biblical image of humanity as created in the image of God into the identical dignity of each human being. To provide context to and to highlight the difficulties involved in Habermas's translation proviso, consideration is given to the thought of Joseph Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI and Alasdair MacIntyre on these themes. What is demonstrated is that Habermas's translation is, in essence, assimilation and re-appropriation. In practice, it manifests itself as the truncation of Christian metaphysics, in which the divine Logos is replaced by or collapsed into the logos of intersubjective human language. The relational image of humanity as a creature distinct from the Creator, in which human reason is analogous to divine reason, is erased, leaving autonomous human beings, from which human reason emerges out of the discursive communication of the logos of intersubjective human language. The conclusion is that the translation proviso fails in its objective. An alternative to Habermas's translation proviso, the presupposition proviso, is presented as a more apt approach to addressing the underlying issues involved: facilitating human flourishing in an orderly, free, and just society.



**Citation:** McKenna, Mary Frances. 2024. Jürgen Habermas's Translation of the Human Being as Created in the Image of God: Perspectives from Joseph Ratzinger and Alasdair MacIntyre. *Religions* 15: 118. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15010118>

Academic Editors: Emin Poljarevic and Jeffrey Haynes

Received: 16 September 2023

Revised: 3 January 2024

Accepted: 9 January 2024

Published: 17 January 2024



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**Keywords:** Habermas; religion; translation proviso; democracy; justice and peace; the human being; human dignity

## 1. Introduction

Jürgen Habermas's translation proviso requires religious claims to be translated into profane or secular language if they are to qualify as legitimate political arguments in the formal processes of will and opinion formation in modern liberal democratic states. The translation proviso is predicated upon Habermas's assertion that only a methodological atheism is philosophically serious (Habermas 2002, p. 160). Philosophical atheism is understood as secular reason. The boundaries of Habermas's own thought necessitate the "translation" of sacred concepts into secular language. Political theory, philosophy, and theology intersect in Habermas's translation proviso. As a contribution to the debate on religion in the public sphere, Habermas's translation proviso is explored in relation to his assertion that post-metaphysical philosophy has salvaged the substance of the concept of the human being in the image of God by translating and assimilating it "through a process of deflation and exhaustion" into the concept of "the identical dignity of all men that deserves unconditional respect" (Habermas 2006b, pp. 44–45).<sup>1</sup> This paper aims to provide clarity on the role of translation in Habermas's philosophy.<sup>2</sup> It seeks to establish whether Habermas's translation proviso is adequate in its original intent; that is, whether translation, in the manner envisioned by Habermas, adequately retains the fullness of the

meaning associated with the original. Only if so could the translation proviso be considered a reasonable and equitable requirement of religions in the public sphere.

To assess Habermas's translation proviso, it is necessary to examine it alongside an example of his own work of translation. Much of Habermas's writings on translation and his translation of the sacred image of the human being are scattered across multiple publications. As a prelude to considering Habermas's thought on each of these topics, these strands of thought are collated into a single account that acts as an introduction to these topics. The next section, Section 2, establishes what Habermas means by translation: What is the context in which it is situated? What purpose does it play in his wider thought? And to what end? In Section 3 of this paper, Habermas's translation of the human being as created in the image of God is explored. The process used to translate sacred concepts into the profane is detailed, along with the associated assumptions. To elucidate the theological issues and philosophical choices involved regarding the translation proviso and the question "who is the human being?", Habermas's translation proviso is explored in relation to the thought of Joseph Ratzinger and Alasdair MacIntyre. In their thought, the Catholic tradition is discernable, which offers readers context for (and a litmus test of) Habermas's critique of religion and the re-appropriation of Christian concepts. In Section 4, an alternative approach to Habermas's for establishing what qualify as legitimate political arguments for the public sphere is outlined. The presupposition proviso aims to more fully respond to the core issues that Habermas's translation proviso attempts to address.

The fundamental issue with Habermas's translation proviso is that it does not solve the problem that it sets out to resolve. The problem in the public sphere of pluralistic societies is not that we do not understand one another. The issue at hand is that we do not agree with one another on fundamentals. This paper demonstrates that the themes associated with Habermas's translation proviso are not limited to establishing legitimate political arguments in modern liberal democratic states. Rather, they relate to human thought in general and the human being specifically. At the heart of these issues are answers to questions such as the following: What is the origin of reason? On what basis does rationality take precedence over irrationality? And, hence, what makes for a reasonable argument, and why would it be binding beyond the threat of enforcement by the state? A presupposition proviso forces clarity on these questions. The (pre-)philosophical commitments and convictions that underpin the rational justifications in support of arguments made in each and every scenario are made explicit. From here, real understanding, as a prelude to communication, if not agreement, in a pluralistic society can occur.

## 2. Translation of the Sacred into the Profane

### 2.1. Habermas's Translation Proviso

Habermas's translation proviso requires secular language, which he equates to philosophical atheism, to be used in the process of will and opinion formation in a liberal democratic constitutional state. This applies to those who hold or who are candidates for public office. It relates to the obligation to remain neutral in terms of worldviews within state institutions. It requires that political statements are justified independent of religious convictions or worldviews because "only secular reason counts beyond the institutional threshold that divides the informal public sphere from parliaments, courts, ministries and administrations" (Habermas 2006a, p. 9). Religious expressions are legitimate solely in the "'wild life' of the political public sphere". The translation proviso is predicated upon the assertion that secular communication alone is legitimate beyond the institutional threshold. This is so because it is claimed that secular reason is assessable to all by being neutral in terms of worldviews. The neutrality principle means that "all enforceable political decisions must be formulated in a language that is equally accessible to all citizens, and it must be possible to justify them in this language as well" (Habermas 2006a, p. 12). To partake in "the institutionalised practice of deliberation and decision-making", translation of religious concepts and language into secular reason must occur in the "pre-parliamentarian domain, i.e., in the political public sphere" (Habermas 2006a, p. 10). Democracy can generate

legitimacy because it includes all participants and has a deliberative character from which rational outcomes emerge. “Majority rule turns into repression if the majority deploys religious arguments in the process of political opinion and will formation and refuses to offer those publicly accessible justifications which the losing minority, be it secular or of a different faith, is able to follow and to evaluate in the light of shared standards” (Habermas 2006a, pp. 12–13). A clash of worldviews and religious doctrine can only be avoided if a community is based on liberal democratic constitutional values.

## 2.2. *Secular Reason, the Impulses of Religion, and the Defense of Democracy*

Habermas is alert to the paradox that in democratic, constitutional societies, which are built upon the assumption that citizens give one another good reasons for their political stances, and which are designed to ensure that religious communities have equal freedom to participate in civil society, these states also place firm barriers to religious influence on the public bodies responsible for collective decision-making (Habermas 2013, pp. 371–77). Religious citizens are authorized to practice their religion and lead pious lives. But secular democratic processes, in which the formation of will and opinion is central, must remain free of religious “contamination” (Habermas 2011, pp. 23–28). Translation is necessary to protect decision-making bodies, whose ultimate outcome is legally binding decisions, from religious interference (Habermas 2006a, pp. 4–6).

“For all the world religions associate with ritual practices their own epistemic paths to the sacred, be it revelation, meditation and ascetic exercise, or prayer. These particularistic ties explain the need, in the context of the political will formation of a pluralistic society, to test the generalisable content of religious assertions independently of their epistemic context of origin. This is the point of the translation proviso”.

(Habermas 2013, pp. 375–76)

The activity of translation is, for Habermas, a collective effort of the whole of society, i.e., those with religious and non-religious perspectives. Such collaborative translation of religious concepts is predicated upon the principle of the ethic of citizenship, in which all citizens acknowledge that each citizen can make meaningful contributions to political debate. Thus, from an ethical (but not legal) perspective, all citizens are acknowledged to be endowed with equal rights and are recognized as participants in co-legislation. Religious citizens cannot be a priori dismissed as irrational, just as secular citizens cannot be dismissed by those of religious persuasion (Habermas 2006a, pp. 9–12). Habermas insists that if reason and religion are to speak to one another, rather than at or about one another, reason must accept that religion has meaningful contributions to offer. Likewise, religion must accept the authority of natural reason “as the fallible results of the institutionalised sciences and the basic principles of universalistic egalitarianism in law and morality” (Habermas 2010a, p. 16). Without this structure for dialogue, it is the secular character of the state, rather than religions, that is endangered.

Habermas’s translation proviso acknowledges that religious traditions “have a special power to articulate moral intuitions, especially with regard to vulnerable forms of communal life” (Habermas 2006a, p. 10). The intuitions and impulses of meaning that religious communities carry are, for Habermas, sources of community-making and of motivation for social solidarity that modernity is not capable of generating itself. These intuitions and impulses also provide resources to bolster secular reason against the defeatism prevalent in the radicalization of the dialectic of enlightenment and in a naïve faith in science and empiricism. Following on from Kant’s assessment of practical reason’s inability to justify communal acts of solidarity in the manner that he claims it can for individual observance of moral duty, Habermas states that one can only “hope” that social solidarity and associated action will arise from individuals fulfilling their duty (Habermas 2013, p. 356; 2010b, p. 75). The communal practices of religion, which are “solidarity-founding”, are required by secular societies to address the impact of globalization, which is too great for democratic secular societies to manage. Modernity’s cultural resources which inform its

self-understanding—that is, its scientific orientation to truth, the egalitarian universalism of law and morality, and the autonomy of art and criticism—have not yet “mastered” the increasing complexity generated by globalization. Such a situation necessitates these additional sources of motivation to engender communal actions for social solidarity (Habermas 2006b; 2010b, pp. 74–75; 2013, pp. 352–57). If religion loses that ability to organize the encounter with the sacred and shrivels to being a “fleeting religiosity”, it would become just another form of ethical life.

Religious language, according to Habermas, is beneficial in public debate where it calls attention to forgotten or repressed dimensions of “morally sensitive issues”. Religious language sheds new light on things that secular reason is inadequate to describe. However, where lines between religious and secular expressions are blurred, Habermas claims that the secular state is incapable of directing religious content towards the public sphere, where natural reason pertains. The “militant powers of belief” that drove historical upheavals and clashes within premodern states, for Habermas, demonstrate the unstable nature of religious worldviews as a basis for political communities. Religious universalism and claims of validity are not only specific to a community of belief; they resemble the centered universalism of ancient empires. Dogmatic and fixed religious beliefs are capable only of incorporating the assimilated other into their own perspective. In contrast, a society of free, equal, and autonomous citizens is stable because it offers its citizens good reasons for the legitimacy of its foundational principles—principles that are generally acceptable to all citizens. By translating the universalistic core of religious communities’ fundamental convictions into the principles of human rights and democracy, a shared standpoint exists in secular reason that transcends the social boundaries of each religious community. This shared language, discovered in the Enlightenment, for Habermas, marks a decisive movement in perspective that allowed for rational morality and rational law (Habermas 2013, pp. 372–75).

### 2.3. *Secular Reason as a Shared Language Accessible to All*

Secular reason, Habermas argues, offers an “inclusive we” that obliges religious communities to engage in mutual perspective-taking that does not determine a specific outcome. Mutual perspective-taking is central to the process of discursive will and opinion formation within democratic constitutional societies. As a process of understanding, it is based upon a decentering of one’s own viewpoint that, Habermas argues, allows for reciprocal learning among those of different perspectives. Each particular view is fused with other outlooks, which, as per Gadamer, creates an ever more enlarged and shared horizon. The decentering of post-metaphysical thought offers propositional truths around which all can coalesce. In such a context, religious communities are confronted with the task of justifying the secular constitutional principles of the state within the context of their own faith. By doing so, they recognize the distinction between the infallible truths of faith and fallible public reason that, in principle, can be accepted by all (Habermas 2002, pp. 149–54; 2013, p. 375).

While the ethics of democratic citizenship requires mutual recognition, Habermas argues that it is the framework of self-reflection that generates “attitudes of tolerance”, which are the essential elements to emerge from the processes of decentering and reciprocal learning. It is only through these that one may hope that the cognitive attitudes required for mutual recognition in a democratic constitutional society will arise. They cannot be prescribed by political theory or law. Habermas’s approach is different to previous Enlightenment projects associated with the critique of religion offered by Kant’s successors, from Feuerbach and Marx to Bloch, Benjamin, and Adorno. Habermas contends that these asked too much of reason. Habermas instead argues that the “glowing embers” of religion are to be respected, albeit at a distance, and that the meaning emanating from those embers is to be rescued by secular reason and re-appropriated for modernity (Habermas 2003a, pp. 112–13).

“Those moral feelings which only religious language has as yet been able to give a sufficiently differentiated expression may find universal resonance once a salvaging formulation turns up for something almost forgotten, but implicitly missed. The mode for non destructive secularisation is translation”.

(Habermas 2003a, p. 114)

Such translations express profound interpersonal and existential experiences in secular language, some of which “leave us speechless”. To date, only religious language has adequately articulated such experiences (Habermas 2002, p. 164). Habermas’ translation proviso is caveated by two qualifications: First, translation of sacred concepts into secular language is not a re-embedding of reason in history or nature. Modernity is compatible only with Kantian universalism, and religions that fail to acknowledge the cognitive limits of modernity, insisting instead on retaining premodern religious attitudes, are fundamentalist (Habermas 2002, p. 151). Second, he acknowledges that it is an open question as to whether the political deficiencies of modernity can indeed be offset by translation of the unexhausted meaning of religious concepts into secular language (Habermas 2013, p. 357).

#### *2.4. Translation as a Structurally Critical Aspect of Habermas’s Thought*

Habermas’s translation proviso is embedded in his evolutionary view of the historical development of religious consciousness. It is Habermas’s contention that humanity has evolved from one stage of religious consciousness to higher levels through structural transformations in religious worldviews. Such evolutions are catalyzed by encounters with profane or mundane sources of knowledge. Internal learning processes are sparked, which generate a shift in moral consciousness. Three evolutionary stages are identified (myth and tribal ritual, the Axial Age, and modernity). The Axial Age transitioned from the myth and tribal ritual of the “this worldly” to forms of transcendence perceived by monotheism and cosmic law developed in Israel, Greece, China, and India. Habermas maintains that this shift in consciousness was, in part, a response against the repressive and belligerent authorities of ancient empires and, in part, a response to the vagaries of the gods of myth. The reaction created a new moral consciousness with new moral standards. It is in this period that the symbiosis of Pauline Christianity and Greek philosophy, which Habermas views as the essential aspect of Christianity, occurred.

“The sublimation of the sacred into a transcendent power went hand-in-hand with distinct paths to salvation, which in turn involved an ethical reinterpretation of the traditional rites and the abolition (or late on the inversion) of the magical meaning of sacrifice”.

(Habermas 2013, p. 350)

The modern self-understanding of reason emerged from a three-stage process of de-Hellenization in which, Habermas maintains, nominalism destroyed the framework of Christian natural law and Aristotelian natural philosophy (Habermas 2010a, pp. 16–18, 22–23). The impact of this epochal shift was also reflected in the alliance of philosophy with science. Reformed religious conscience and post-metaphysical thinking are both responses to the Enlightenment’s secular sources of knowledge. However, Habermas maintains that it is only post-metaphysical thought, in its quest for justifications, that is accessible and convincing to all. Secular (or finite) reason develops its self-understanding in relation to science and religion, finding its limits through an ongoing learning process. In that process, biblical imagery reminds secular reason of dimensions “abandoned too hastily”. Post-secular society, he claims, continues the work for religion that religion did for myth by acting as a transformer that redirects the flow of traditions. Habermas acknowledges that philosophical reason and religious belief belong to the same genealogy (Habermas 2017, 2023). Importantly, in this learning process, reason retains its autonomy and remains the superior intellectual formation. Rejecting any notion of a relativistic self-denial of reason emerging from such learning processes, Habermas insists that secular reason and historicism “makes us sensitive to cultural differences and prevents us from



over-generalising context-dependent judgements” (Habermas 2010a, pp. 17–18, 23; 2010b, pp. 80–82).

In post-metaphysical philosophy’s work of translation, Habermas makes an important distinction between theology, which is scholarly work based upon revealed truth, and religion, which is independent of revealed truth (Habermas 2002, p. 164). Where Christian theology drew upon metaphysics to articulate and develop the meaning of the Christian faith, post-metaphysics “assimilates” and “transposes” that content while applying its own methodology of justification and scientific knowledge. Hegel’s impulse to historical thinking allowed philosophy to discover the religious heritage within itself, fusing critical concepts associated with the human—such as person and freedom—with the biblical tradition. In translating religious concepts, impulses of meaning expressed by premodern religions and metaphysics, secular reason makes them accessible to modernity. What matters in relation to these philosophical translations, from Habermas’s perspective, is their persuasiveness in the secular sphere (Habermas 2010b, pp. 79–80). Nicholas Adams, in this regard, contends that Habermas rejects Thomas Aquinas not because his moral philosophy is incoherent, but because the changed social conditions make those claims no longer plausible (Adams 2006, p. 123). In making sacred concepts accessible to modernity, Habermas is looking to address deficiencies that he, in line with Kant’s original assessment, identifies in the motivation for social solidarity within democratic constitutional societies. This gap is underpinned by the individualistic orientation of modern ethics and politics. In acknowledging that philosophical ethics has yet to achieve the fluency that religions have captured in articulating moral intuitions, Habermas looks to translation to align the categorical imperative with the solidarity that binds together individual members of a community (Habermas 2002, pp. 162–63).

As a prelude to a critique of Habermas’s translation proviso, Ratzinger/Benedict XVI’s and MacIntyre’s thoughts on the theme are now considered.<sup>3</sup>

## 2.5. Alternatives to Habermas’s Translation Proviso

### 2.5.1. A Socratic-Pauline Dialogue with Cultures and Religions: Ratzinger/Benedict XVI

Habermas has reached out on many fronts to dialogue on the role of religion in the public sphere, not least with Ratzinger in 2004, who a year later was elected Pope Benedict XVI. Ratzinger agrees with Habermas on two accounts: First, that faith must be translated into the cultural forms encountered. Second, that reason and religion must engage in a double learning process (Ratzinger 2006, p. 77). His definition and process of translation is, however, fundamentally at odds with Habermas’s. Translation, for Ratzinger, is identity in essentials in which the culture’s specific “thinking and living” are encountered. Specific concepts and forms of the encountered culture are “broken up and so brought to a new fruitfulness” (Ratzinger 2005, pp. 358–60). The answer to atheism, for Ratzinger, is not the translation of biblical concepts into the secular but, first and foremost, the Church “manifesting the face of God by showing its own face of unity and love”. This includes both the acknowledgement of Christian disunity and their consent to systems of social injustice (Ratzinger 1967, p. 157). In the Church’s faith in God as one being in three persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), Ratzinger sees a third fundamental category in addition to the two identified in ancient Greek philosophy, those of substance and accident: faith in the God of Jesus Christ allows for the category of relatedness to be perceived. He contends that this relatedness or relation category has implications for human thought that have yet to be unpacked (Ratzinger 2004a, pp. 137–61, 183; [1973] 1990).

Ratzinger’s response to Habermas is to dispense with attempts to convince of the merits of Natural Law while nonetheless standing within that Catholic tradition. He asks a series of questions that get to the heart of the intrinsic problems of the pursuit of reason, the Good, and justice, while also welcoming Habermas’s insistence that reason and religion must engage in a double learning process. Ratzinger places reason and faith on the same level as collaborators in that endeavor, each acting as the guardian of the other, purifying the other of pathologies (Ratzinger 2006). His assumption is that the state and Church are

separate; that the things of Caesar are given to Caesar, and to God what is God's. For him, democracy is the appropriate form of state governance because it allows for collaboration in the development of law, which means that the law created is everyone's law. There are important limits to this approach. Laws can be unjust, and there are fundamental things that can never be subject to the will of the majority.

Ratzinger the scholar looked to awaken and bolster in his listeners' hearts the search for truth and justice. As Pope Benedict XVI, he developed the themes of his 2004 dialogue with Habermas in a series of addresses with representatives of academia, culture and civil society, politics, and law, commencing with his Regensburg address in 2006 and concluding with his address to the Reichstag in 2011 ([Benedict XVI 2006](#), [2008a](#), [2008b](#), [2010](#), [2011](#)). These addresses should be read in relation to his encyclicals: *Deus Caritas Est* (2005), *Spe Salvi* (2007), *Caritas in Veritate* (2009), and what is essentially his fourth encyclical, issued by Pope Francis three months after his election, *Lumen Fidei* (2013). He is the Socratic Pauline figure who asks fundamental questions about the assumptions underpinning worldviews ([McKenna 2022](#)). Why does rationality take precedence over irrationality? What is a reasonable argument? What is the Good? Are there things that are never subjected to consensus? How is law legal and not simply the arbitrary assertion of interests by the powerful? Ratzinger/Benedict XVI attempts to draw out the underlying assumptions underpinning each worldview, whether that of modernity or of any other culture. From there, he hopes that the assumptions underpinning worldviews are constructively critiqued and appropriately developed in a collaborative effort in search of justice and peace.

At the core of this is modernity's assumption of human reason—the assumption that it is by nature rational. On what basis is human reason rational? What are the implications of the primacy of rationality over irrationality? ([McKenna 2018, 2019](#)). In his Regensburg address, he develops this theme. He notes that the modern scientific method is intrinsically Platonic in that it presupposes the inherent rationality of matter as manifested in mathematics. It is the mathematical structure that makes matter comprehensible and capable of being harnessed by humanity. This means that modern scientific methodology accepts as a given the premise that matter has a rational structure. Why, he asks, is that so? He wonders why that given is not also applied to the whole realm of existence, including the human spirit. This question of the given of the rationality of matter for natural sciences, he contends, is one that the natural sciences cannot answer themselves. It is a question that must be remanded to theology and philosophy ([Benedict XVI 2006](#)). The given of the rational structure of matter, for him, points beyond itself, with far-reaching implications for the human sciences. His alternative to Habermas's translation proviso is embedded in Catholic tradition and the biblical synthesis of faith and reason: the Word/Logos was made flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14). In pursuit of just law in orderly, free, and flourishing communities, he asks pertinent questions of all traditions and worldviews, whether religious or philosophical. Based on human reason being analogous to divine reason, he seeks to elicit insightful responses from each tradition that all can learn from, develop, and then apply. In that approach, faith and reason each act within their own sphere while operating as guardian to the other.

#### 2.5.2. A Different Diagnosis of the Problem: Alasdair MacIntyre

Alasdair MacIntyre's later work addresses the deep human concerns that underlie philosophy's basic problems ([MacIntyre 2009a](#), pp. 133, 134, 165–71, 176). MacIntyre argues that the thought emanating from the Enlightenment era reflects a history of important (if illuminating) errors that came about through badly posed questions ([MacIntyre 2010](#), pp. 61–74). MacIntyre's thought is shaped by two questions: First, how is one to decide between rival philosophical claims where each makes a compelling case in an environment where there is never a decisive resolution to any central disputed area of philosophy? This situation, he notes, is in stark contrast to the progress evident in the natural sciences in the modern era. Second, how is an individual to constructively engage as a rational agent in the moral, political, religious, and scientific conflicts of their time? ([MacIntyre](#)

2010, pp. 70–74; 2013, pp. 17–34). In other words, how is rational inquiry to be achieved within society so that it positively influences society as a whole? MacIntyre found no adequate answers to his questions in Enlightenment or modern thought (MacIntyre 2010, pp. 61–74). Latterly, he described much of modern public discourse and day-to-day life as an unrestrictive movement between the assertion of unqualified principles and the assertion of exceptions to those unqualified principles in the name of public security and economic prosperity (MacIntyre 2013, p. 21). He goes as far as saying that, from the standpoint of the tradition of the virtues, modern politics, whatever its hue—conservative, liberal, socialist, or radical—“simply has to be rejected” (MacIntyre 1985, pp. 253–55).

In *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, MacIntyre juxtaposes as incompatible the goods of cooperative effectiveness, as exemplified by the Athens of Pericles, and the goods of excellence, as articulated by Plato (MacIntyre 1988). MacIntyre argues that Plato’s goods of excellence are a reaction against Periclean Athens. He positions Plato’s response to Periclean Athens as a rejection of what had enabled not just the Peloponnesian War, but also Athens’ ultimate defeat in that war. He notes that some of the characters in Plato’s dialogues played roles in key decisions of that war, such as Gorgia, Chariades, Laches, and Nicias, among others (Thucydides 1972). The goods of cooperative effectiveness of Periclean Athens, MacIntyre contends, are Homeric, having four essential traits or goals: (1) To be the best and preeminent above others is esteemed. (2) Excellence and winning are indelibly linked. (3) The honor and glory of wealth and power are pursued for both for the self and the polis. (4) Limitations placed by others upon an individual’s or the polis’s achievements are not tolerated (MacIntyre 1988, pp. 47–68, 389). MacIntyre comments that the vision that Pericles offered Athens assumes that all of the various goods desired by Athens could be pursued harmoniously by the polis. No recognition is made of the potential destructiveness to individuals or the polis of pursuing multiple incompatible goods.

As MacIntyre understands it, the rhetoric through which Periclean Athens determined what to do was based on shared assumptions about what is desirable or good to pursue. It is that shared understanding that formed the basis of the arguments for action. Public deliberation in Periclean Athens, as a result, took the form of the techniques of rhetoric, persuasion, and manipulation, in which the rational evaluation of ends is excluded. Non-rational reasons for action were offered that provided no “defensible account of ends” pursued (MacIntyre 1988, p. 67). Plato’s response, MacIntyre contends, provided the first well-articulated theory of human excellence—a de-Homeric philosophy, as it were. Within this theory, the question “what am I to do?” is intrinsically linked to human excellence. As such, it provides rational reasons for why the goods of excellence take precedence over the goods of cooperative effectiveness. MacIntyre maintains that only when questions about justice and practical reasoning are posed together within a philosophical context in which the question “what am I to do?” is considered, as Plato did, can rival claims be evaluated and good reasons for action be identified. In Plato’s approach, action is determined by the end of human excellence, rather than (as per Periclean Athens) by whatever means are necessary to achieve an interest or desire (MacIntyre 1988, p. 69).

MacIntyre’s response to contemporary moral philosophy is an “educated mind” that takes up and develops themes in St. John Henry Newman’s *Idea of a University* (Newman 2015). An educated mind, as MacIntyre describes it, is an Aristotelian mind. Such a mind can think about the ends of a variety of human activities, evaluate those activities, and choose the appropriate actions to achieve the goods of the Good. An educated mind is one that all should aspire to develop; it is the very opposite of narrow specialization and professionalization. An educated mind “has its own distinctive ends” and is not a prelude to specialized graduate research or professional accreditations (MacIntyre 2009b, p. 362). To be capable of appropriately evaluating the ends of a variety of human activities, and thereby determining the activities to be undertaken to achieve goods and the Good, requires, in MacIntyre’s view, finely tuned and wise judgement, as per Aristotle’s *phronesis* and Aquinas’s *prudentialia*. Judgement is the prelude to action, and *prudentialia* is required to choose the appropriate actions in any given circumstance to achieve the ends sought. It is



critical for MacIntyre's notion of an educated mind that not only does that mind know what it is doing, and thereby know what one is not doing by doing what it does, but also that it actively chooses the activities to undertake to achieve its final end in the Good, and thereby flourish as a human being (MacIntyre 2009b, pp. 359–60). An educated mind exercises sound practical reasoning when it validates and verifies the assumptions underpinning its considerations.

## 2.6. Religion in Habermas's Kantian Republican Framework

In 2013, in a "Reply to My Critics", Habermas acknowledged that his position on religion in the public sphere "is not yet sufficiently developed" (Habermas 2013, p. 347). Nonetheless, clear lines are evident and have remained consistent. Even so, there is real tension in Habermas's argument on religion in the public sphere. He gives with one hand, acknowledging the need for a double learning process, while taking with the other, asserting that post-metaphysical philosophy has shattered the synthesis of Christian faith and metaphysics, and that philosophical atheism has superseded religion (Habermas 2010a, pp. 16, 22). This prompted Nicholas Adams to rightly argue of Habermas that "He has a barbed-hook theory of rationalisation. It can go one way relatively easily, although it might need a push. But once it has gone in that direction, it cannot be reversed" (Adams 2006, p. 68). It is difficult to ascertain whether Habermas's primary assent on religion and metaphysics is open or closed. It can, however, be described in some ways as a fishing expedition.

What is evident from the discussion above is that translation plays at least a fivefold role in his thought. First, it protects secular, democratic, constitutional states from religious interference. Second, it enables the paradigm of the separation of Church and state to be reimagined as the exclusion of religious language and justifications from the formal processes of will and opinion formation, and from the creation and dispensing of law. Third, it embeds a structural system of thought that places philosophical atheism as the standard of rational justification that must be adhered to. This is justified by the claim that the fact of modernity equates to or is only compatible with Kantian universalism. Fourth, the translation proviso enables post-metaphysics to incorporate or re-appropriate aspects of other systems of thought, which are described as pre-rational, to address acknowledged gaps within its own system of thought, e.g., the motivation for social solidarity. In that operation, Habermas distinguishes theology (revelation) from religion; nonetheless, the materials that he translates into secular thought are Christian concepts. Fifth, as will be seen in the next section, the translation proviso allows Christian metaphysics, in which can be found the creative eternal reason of the Logos of God who is love, to be truncated to the self-referential logos of human language, which is fallible. This is not simply one idea that emerged in his maturity, nor is it a mechanism to facilitate political deliberation. Translation of religious or sacred concepts into secular language is a core structural aspect of his thought. The problem that Habermas is trying to solve emanates from his specific methodological starting point—that is, methodological atheism. What Habermas is grappling with, given the continued and unexpected persistence of religion in modern secular states, is finding an appropriate place for religion within that framework. Outside of that framework, Habermas's specific idea of translation holds no role.

Translation of religious concepts into secular language became a prominent aspect of Habermas's thought after the turn of the millennium. It was the unexpected continuing role of religion in secular democratic societies that brought it to the fore (Habermas 2006a, pp. 1–4). Yet translation of religious concepts by modernity has long held a place in Habermas' work. Habermas has been translating since his doctorate, entitled, "The Absolute and History: the Ambivalence of Schelling's Thought", where he referenced Gershom Scholem's thought. In 1978, Habermas reflected on that work:

“Among the modern societies, only those that are able to introduce into the secular domain the essential content of their religious traditions which point beyond the merely human realm will also be able to rescue the substance of the human”.

(Habermas 1978; Reder and Schmitt 2010)

A close reading of Habermas indicates that the translation of religious concepts is not so much an arriving at the same conclusion from different perspectives, but a simple acquisition of things needed from religious and other philosophical traditions. These acquired things are used to plug gaps in modernity’s self-understanding while simultaneously claiming that modernity is self-sufficient. What Habermas is doing cannot be described as “translation”. It is, as he himself has often, in parallel, described it, the activity of assimilation and re-appropriation. Ratzinger, as Benedict XVI, describes it in his 2011 address to the Reichstag as modern philosophy “covertly drawing upon God’s raw materials, which we refashion into our own products” (Benedict XVI 2011).

In his proposal, Habermas assumes that the liberal democratic constitutional state is the norm and is the enduring political entity (see also Brieskorn 2010). If Habermas’s translation proviso operated outside this norm, whatever the dominant worldview was would take the place of secular reason (see also Urbinati 2012). Each worldview within those political entities would have to accept the dominant worldview in order to enter the political deliberation process. The translation proviso would then result in the re-appropriation of concepts into the dominant worldview’s language and idea of reason. In practice, this is often what happens. Moreover, Habermas’s worldview reflects a specific understanding of democracy in which religion is a problem to be solved—a unique threat to peace. In his insistence on a neutral worldview where religion is kept at bay, he is blind to the very pejorative worldview that he holds to be neutral and the mythic basis of the modern prejudices that underpin it. If a state rightly cannot be Jewish, Christian, or Muslim, then nor (to be consistent) can it be based on specific philosophical worldviews, e.g., Kantian or Marxist (Taylor 2011, pp. 36–37, 48–51; Biggar 2009a, pp. 162–73).

The impulses behind the desire to translate religious concepts into the profane so that they are “accessible” to modernity is one that all Christians would support. For post-metaphysical philosophy to do so while insisting on the rejection of metaphysics and Christianity, and of religions in general, and in parallel claiming self-sufficiency, is problematic. Taking up the impulses from Christianity to inform post-metaphysical moral and political philosophy is like receiving a heart transplant without acknowledging the basis of the life given by the other. Post-metaphysics, in the hue advocated by scholars like Habermas, who assimilate the sacred into the secular, cannot then claim that modernity provides the resources that make its worldview self-sufficient and self-sustaining. In the displacement or assimilation of God by post-metaphysics, the God particle remains the divine Logos who is love no matter how it is reimagined or re-appropriated. The impulses that resonate with modernity should be understood in relation to Paul’s assertion on the law and the gentiles: “For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus” (Romans 2: 13–16).

## 2.7. Points of Confluence and Divergence with Ratzinger and MacIntyre

Ratzinger’s and MacIntyre’s thoughts offer Christian perspectives and accounts of Christian engagement with the world. While they present seemingly quite different accounts, their starting and end points are completely aligned. These accounts are embedded in, while also developing, the symbiosis of biblical faith and Greek philosophy. Ratzinger’s emphasis is theological, with an assent on Pauline–Augustinianism, while MacIntyre’s emphasis is philosophical, specifically in the tradition of Thomas Aquinas. Ratzinger is

seeking to engage the world in critical questions on the rationality of reason; on the meaning of justice, the Good, and ultimate reality. It is these questions and their antecedents that, for Ratzinger, offer a door to dialogue with the cultures and religions of the world. MacIntyre's thought is embedded in Thomas Aquinas's systematic philosophy. Thomism, the tradition that has developed Aquinas's thought, is one of the most significant schools in Catholic theology and philosophy. Aquinas made critical contributions to the development of theology and philosophy. For example, the insight that essences are only possibilities for existence; that existence is the supreme actuality and perfection (Kreeft 2009). However, the highly systematic nature of Aquinas's thought can make dialogue with other cultures and worldviews difficult (Rowland 2017, pp. 43–89). Regardless of their different emphases, within which there are real philosophical differences, faith is a constituent element of Ratzinger's and MacIntyre's thought. Faith shapes and heals reason, and human reason is analogous with divine reason.

The question that presents itself is whether dialogue that goes beyond a series of polite (if robust) responses is possible among Habermas, Ratzinger, and MacIntyre and the traditions that they represent. Does Habermas's adamant assertion that philosophical atheism is the only serious philosophical methodology create an impasse? In other words, in denying access to religious language in the public sphere, are the conditions necessary for dialogue satisfied? Can a faith-orientated and -shaped approach to religion in the public sphere find real points of connection with a philosophy that asserts the primacy of a methodological atheism? Habermas's translation proviso acknowledges the impasse and attempts to avoid this very clash of worldviews in the public sphere. His mechanism gives no ground on the methodology that must be adopted for participation in the public sphere. In Habermas's account of translation, the concepts are reinterpreted by methodological atheism. Such a process is satisfactory from Habermas's perspective, not least because important materials that post-metaphysics is unable to provide itself are garnered. From a Christian perspective, the essential Christian content—God as one being in three persons who is Logos and love—is lost in Habermas's translation, even if Christian concepts shape post-metaphysical thought. If a head-on clash between Habermas and Christian thought is envisaged, the answer would have to be that engagement will remain a series of robust monologues that are continually refined to better respond at the next encounter. If, however, the structure of engagement is reimagined, something very different could emerge. If the structure of engagement is shifted to first agreement on the pre-philosophical convictions underpinning each worldview, understanding is the starting point of dialogue. Communication then commences with understanding one another rather than on agreement on one specific philosophical methodology to underpin that communication. Subsequent agreement can then emerge based on the shared understanding of each participant's starting point. How this approach specifically manifests in each state or culture will reflect that culture's own development of thought. For example, in the West, this means the separation of Church and state, while in the East this is not so. The presupposition proviso will be discussed in Section 4.

### 3. Habermas's Translation of Humanity as Created in the Image of God

Turning now to a practical example of translation, consideration is given to Habermas's own translation of the human being as created in the image of God. There are two aspects to this: The first is the human being as a moral agent of equal intrinsic dignity. The second is the biblical description in Genesis of the creation of the human being and the Fall of humanity. Two alternative interpretations of the human being created in the image of God are then considered. Ratzinger's theological and MacIntyre's philosophical interpretations are discussed ahead of a critique of Habermas's translation.

#### 3.1. *The Human Being as a Moral Agent*

The meaning that Habermas ascribes to human dignity can be gleaned from his response to concerns about the potential impact of biological and genetic engineering

in a series of articles presented immediately after the turn of the millennium. Such an understanding is set within the context of Kant's decoupling of justice and morality from ethics and questions about the right way to live. Habermas argues that, as such, post-metaphysics may no longer prescribe how to successfully be oneself. In modern philosophy, just moral solutions, by being neutral of worldviews, and because they are justified by good reasons, can be acceptable to all. They articulate "what lies in the equal interest of everyone and what is equally good for all" (Habermas 2003b, p. 3). Morality and ethics are both oriented to the question of what I or we ought to do. Habermas contends that this question carries a different sense under each heading. Under morality, it is a question of the rights and duties that each individual ascribes to others from an inclusive "we" perspective. Under ethics, which seeks to determine what is good for me, or, in a shared life, for us, it is a question of a particular life with its own history and context, coupled with questions of identity. So, as Habermas contends, we can nourish ourselves from traditional sources, but modern philosophy no longer answers these questions, remaining instead on the metalevel, investigating only "formal properties of processes of self-understanding, without taking a position on the contents" (Habermas 2003b, p. 4; 2003c, pp. 32–33).

The modern meaning of morality and human dignity is illustrated through the reflective nature of humans as moral beings. Human beings judge and act morally when they understand themselves as authors of their own life history and recognize other human beings as autonomous persons with equal dignity. As a community of moral beings, humanity creates laws to regulate matters requiring norms and does so in terms of rights and duties. Members of such a community address one another intersubjectively, placing one another under obligations, with the expectation of conformity to such norms. Human dignity, in a legal and moral sense, is "connected with this relational symmetry. It indicates the kind of 'inviolability' which comes to have a significance in interpersonal relations of mutual respect in the egalitarian dealings among persons" (Habermas 2003c, pp. 28–29, 32–33). In this regard, Habermas contends that Kant's egalitarian universalism is the secular expression of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1–7:29) (Habermas 2003b, p. 6).

Moral behavior, in Habermas's view, is a constructive response to human beings' social environment, in which they are dependent on others for care, help, and respect, and where they are vulnerable in body and as individuals. Autonomy and free will exist as strengths insofar as they are recognized to exist within these dependencies and vulnerabilities. Thus, Habermas understands the normative regulation of interpersonal relations as a "porous shell" of "fragile constructions" protecting the body and individual. The individual self, or subject, exists through the body as a "soul possessing receptacle of the spirit". The subject, Habermas states, is "unfinished" at birth, emerging through socialization within the linguistic community. Only when integrated into relations of mutual respect can human beings emerge as individuals and maintain their personal identity. As Habermas sees it, at the point of dissolution of the symbiosis of mother and child, the neonate enters the world of persons who can be approached, addressed, and talked to by other persons. Through integration with the linguistic community, an organism becomes an individual person with rights. In this way, the person learns to identify themselves as a person, as a member of a community or communities, and as a unique and nonexchangeable individual. Such a "tripartite" self-understanding, Habermas observes, reflects that of the linguistic community itself. Human reason is described as an innate faculty, and linguistic communication is positioned as the space of reasons (Sellars) disclosed through discourse. For Habermas, reason, in the diverse perspectives of self and the world, emerges in the linguistic community as a unifying and consensus-creating force (Habermas 2003c, pp. 34–35).

Post-metaphysical thinking "deflates" the power beyond us of the wholly "other" so that power is no longer placed in "God", but in the logos of human language and linguistic intersubjective communication. The modern linguistic turn, Habermas contends, recognizes the linguistic structure that human beings, as historical and social beings, exist within, describing it as a transcending power. Language is intersubjectively shared, and

the subjectivity of speakers is preceded and grounded in the power of the intersubjective. Language, in this regard, is a shared medium of communicative practices and processes through which human beings reach understandings of the world and of interpersonal and self-understanding. The logos of human language, in its intersubjective communication, frees humanity from things of this world by providing a distance from the happenings of the world (Habermas 2003b, pp. 10–11; 2010b, p. 83). Language is not our possession, nor is its utilization under the subject's discretion. Human beings are free, Habermas maintains, only so long as the "binding force of the justifiable claims they raise towards one another" remain in place. The logos of human language, in its intersubjectivity, preserves the unconditionedness of truth and freedom. From this, Habermas concludes that correct ethical self-understanding is achieved in a common endeavor, rather than being revealed or given. In that way, being ourselves emerges as a trans-subjective rather than an absolute power (Habermas 2003b, pp. 10–11). Habermas freely acknowledges that Christian sources nourish his understanding of the logos of language and of communicative action, with its orientation towards mutual understanding. He does, however, underscore important differences. The "telos of reaching an understanding" conforms to methodological atheism and to the demands for "justificatory speech". The measure of discursively directed agreement is "the double negation of criticisable validity claims". This is the standard of intersubjective recognition (Habermas 2002, p. 160).

### 3.2. Genesis: Creation and the Fall of Humanity

The logos of human language facilitates Habermas's assimilation and reinterpretation of Scripture's description of the creation of humanity in the image of God. Habermas contends that the Judaic ethic of justice and the Christian ethic of love are the indispensable sources of modernity's normative self-understanding. Habermas is specifically referring to universalistic egalitarianism's ideals of freedom, solidarity, autonomy, emancipation, moral consciousness, democracy, and human rights (Habermas 2002, p. 149). Habermas claims that one does not need to believe in God to understand the Genesis 1:27 creation account. He interprets *Gottesebenbildlichkeit*, "in the likeness of God", in relation to the requirements necessary for love and freedom to exist: the recognition of the self in the other and mutual recognition, respectively. Habermas takes up the creatural nature of the image, noting that God's other, humanity, must be free if God's affection is to be returned. Equally, the difference between God and humanity must not be set aside or ignored, for in that way freedom is retained. God's creation does not "imply a determination interfering with man's self-determination". What it does enable and oblige of human beings is to be free in terms of a moral being, with all that that entails in the "morally sensitive universe" that God's voice communicates. Genesis 1:27, for Habermas, establishes what freedom implies for those whose equal birth provides for equal freedom (Habermas 2003a, pp. 114–15).

In terms of interpreting the first Adam, Habermas returns to his doctoral thesis on Schelling with its references to translation and the work of Gershom Scholem. Translation has been a fundamental, if eclipsed, aspect of his thought ever since. There, he explored the "dark" tendency towards finitization (*Verendlichung*) or contraction as an explanation for God's capacity for self-limitation. The first Adam is the ideal creation created in God's spirit. To confirm God's own freedom, God must delimit his own freedom by giving the first Adam the "unconditional freedom of good and evil". In the act of horrific freedom that ushered in world history, the first Adam toppled God from his throne. God now waits for redemption through humanity's own efforts to resurrect fallen human nature. Habermas describes this sequence of events as more than a myth. For him, it demonstrates the meaning of human freedom: "the intersubjective constitution of autonomy and the meaning of the self-binding of the will's arbitrary freedom to unconditionally valid norms" (Habermas 2002, pp. 161–62). Freedom is not enjoyed alone. One is free insofar as that freedom is recognized by another free individual, and freedom can never exist at the cost of another's freedom. Freedom depends on a moral order and is set against a freedom that is orientated solely in the pursuit of self-interest. The unconditional character of moral



obligation is set within the intersubjectivity of freedom. The “categorical ought” speaks to humanity’s responsibility to invert the history of salvation. “Inserted as authors into such a charged world history, they must answer to world history in the form of a last judgement implacably deferred into the future”. God and the first Adam speak to the freedom that humans as moral beings hold. Freedom is carried simultaneously with the burden of being responsible for overcoming the “catastrophic consequences” of that first act of human freedom (Habermas 2002, p. 161).

### 3.3. *Alternative Interpretations*

#### 3.3.1. Ratzinger and the Truly Human—Two Natures in One Person

Ratzinger described as a fiction the construction of a rational philosophical description of the human being to which all can ascribe and to which the Christian doctrine is latterly added (Ratzinger 1967, pp. 118–19, 146). It is God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ that gives shape and definition to the “quite indeterminate” description of humanity as created in the image of God (Ratzinger 1967, p. 121). For him, it is the Second or Final Adam, Jesus Christ, who gives decisive meaning to the Genesis description of the human being as created in the image of God: Jesus Christ the Logos (Word) become flesh. This does not mean that metaphysics is *the philosophy*, but that God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is creative eternal reason, and that creative eternal reason is love. Ratzinger rejects the juxtaposition of philosophy and theology established by the Thomists arguing for their inseparable unity. Ratzinger insists that humanity does not have access to pure reason or a God’s-eye view. Humanity exists within history. There is “a reason in *faith*”, and that human reason is “conditioned by a historical standpoint” (Ratzinger 1967, p. 120). Metaphysical philosophy is to be understood as existing within that conditioned historical standpoint, where human reason is analogous with divine reason.

For Ratzinger, Genesis’s account of the creation of Adam describes every human being. Adam, the Hebrew for the humanity, is the universal of each particular human being (Ratzinger 1989).<sup>4</sup> Each human being is a creation; each is willed and loved by God. Each human being is a person who, by nature, is a relational being. The Fall of humanity happened when humanity rejected its dependence upon God and refused to accept the finite limits of human existence. In wanting to be God, death, which is sin, entered the world, damaging all subsequent human relations (Ratzinger 1995, pp. 42–49, 79–100). Jesus Christ is the Second or Final Adam who reveals the universal humanity contained in each particular historical human being. In the particular historical human being Jesus of Nazareth, who is the Christ, is revealed the full potential of every human being (Ratzinger [1973] 1990). Jesus Christ is fully human and fully divine, without mixture, confusion, or separation. The truly human is one person uniting two natures. The truly human, then, is the human being participating in divinity by living in relationship with God without reservation (McKenna 2024c). God takes nothing away from the human being. God raises up the human being, guaranteeing a dignity that no one else can. This is true humanism, of which faith presents no barrier to dialogue. Conversely, Ratzinger argued that the humanism of atheism, which has been positioned as the opposite of faith, “can serve as the hinge of the discussion and a means of dialogue” (Ratzinger 1967, pp. 118, 146).

#### 3.3.2. MacIntyre on Human Dignitas and the Respect Due from Justice

Alasdair MacIntyre presents a philosophical account of the human being set within the Thomist school of the Catholic philosophical tradition.<sup>5</sup> He builds upon Charles Taylor’s three modes of societal secularization when describing the implications of the different understandings of God held by theism and atheism. In this way, he sums up the complexity, and in many ways the incommensurability, of the seemingly straightforward procedure that Habermas’s translation proviso seeks to render.

“It is widely held that what theists and atheists disagree about and have reason to disagree about is the existence of God and only that. About everything else, about everything that comprises nature—that is everything except God—there is,

so it is believed, no reason to disagree. I contrast this view with what I take to be the theistic understanding of that disagreement, that it concerns some aspects of *everything*. To be a theist is to understand everything particular as, by reason of its finitude and its contingency, pointing towards God. It is to believe that, if we are to try to understand finite particulars independent of their relationship to God, we are bound to misunderstand them. It is to hold that all explanations and understanding that does not refer us to God both as first cause and final end is incomplete, and that foremost among the finite particulars of which this is true are we ourselves as human beings”.

(MacIntyre 2011, p. 23)

In MacIntyre’s 2021 critique of the notion of “intrinsic human dignity”, he positions this concept as problematic and possibly harmful (MacIntyre 2021). Ascribing intrinsic worth or dignity to every human being is problematic, according to MacIntyre, as this amounts to respect for those who undertake abominable acts such as torturing children. He distinguishes the concept of intrinsic human dignity from the recognition of human dignity as a state of affairs in which each human being is treated with respect. His argument is that the term “intrinsic human dignity” lacks substance, and he contends that it is a rhetorical social and political device designed to secure agreement among those who mainly disagree. Moreover, he contends that those who reach for this term as an adequate modern substitute for the pursuit of justice, prudence, and charity are mistaken. Justice presupposes what it means to be a member of a flourishing community, which, in the traditional view, emanates from what is due to each member from one’s social relationships. While MacIntyre’s first concern is to note the dangerous potential in the modern term “human dignity”, he is also alert to the dangers of a morality based solely on its negative precepts in the absence of the positive precepts from which they derive. Such a morality discredits itself. It is not good enough to free slaves; justice and charity require that the resources necessary for the freed slaves to become what they have it in them to become must also be provided. Freedom to lead a life of misery is not a morality worthy of the name. MacIntyre notes that conservative social and political versions of the Catholic faith can and have radically distorted Catholic morality, discrediting the faith, with destructive consequences.<sup>6</sup>

MacIntyre’s argument rejects the morality of communitarian exchange and Kantian duty, presenting an account of what it is to act justly; an account embedded in Aquinas’ description of *dignitas*.<sup>7</sup> In this, MacIntyre’s argument is well beyond simply comprehending the riches of tradition-based concepts. Like his assessment of the differences between theism and atheism, it points to a set of pre-philosophical convictions that determine philosophical and political arguments. “[I]t is something other than the philosophical analyses and arguments themselves that determine why particular philosophers take this set of reasons rather than that to have compelling force. It seems that such philosophers must be drawing on some set of pre-philosophical convictions and that it is these that, in the end, predetermine their philosophical conclusions”. (MacIntyre 2009a, p. 177). *Dignitas* denotes what is valuable in itself. Human beings, unlike other animals, are rational agents responsible for their choices and actions, and their *dignitas* emanates from their end, which is to know and to love God. Human beings have *dignitas* through their potential, rather than from what they are.

MacIntyre notes that Aquinas insists that we can lose our *dignitas* if, through our choices and actions, we move away from our directedness to God. In sinning, we depart from the order of reason. Critically, MacIntyre comments that regardless of whether human beings sin, departing from the order of reason, human beings are always owed what is their due through justice and charity. This is their due in their potential as rational agents whose end is to know and love God. As rational agents, human beings perfect themselves by moving towards an ever more adequate understanding of themselves and their place in the order of things. Such an understanding, MacIntyre notes, is inadequate until informed by God as the first and final cause. In being a rational agent, the human being educates their desires so that they reflect ever more the adequate object of desire: God. Even if, as

is the case for many, a human being does not know God as their final end, what matters, MacIntyre says of Aquinas's account, is the directedness of particular intermediate ends that depend upon individual characteristics and circumstances.

Individuals decide not on what is generally good to be and do, but on what is best for them to be or do in a particular circumstance. To be able to do this requires that the virtues are to some greater or lesser extent acquired. For MacIntyre, the achievement of our final end means to give due regards to the common good and to goods that are shared with others in the community. We pursue those common goods from a love of that community, not because of what we as individuals achieve through that common good. Human *dignitas* is therefore set within the common good, in which a shared good is always better than an individual good. Our regard for others is then demonstrated by enabling them to actualize their individual potential, which means providing them with the resources to achieve that potential. This leads MacIntyre to reiterate that all forms of individualism, social and political of whatever hue—or in other words, the status quo—are to be rejected in favor of finding forms of community life that abolish involuntary poverty. To treat other human beings with respect in this view, one chooses and acts toward others such that the common good is achieved. In this way, they and we are enabled to become what we have it in us to become, which restores our relationship with God. Justice, prudence, and charity are first among the virtues required to actualize this potential.

While MacIntyre's account of Aquinas's moral philosophy is infused with the Catholic faith, he argues that those who do not believe in or know God can take this morality as their own in acknowledging that if we were to act otherwise, we would be acting unjustly. Nothing, in fact, is owed, as such, to an individual. What is owed to individuals is owed through their social relationships, through which the common good is achieved. The act of justice is then intrinsically linked to what it means to flourish in a community. Without an account of what justice means within a flourishing community in which the common good takes primacy over individual goods, MacIntyre argues that appeals to justice, which are the basis for modern descriptions of human dignity, are bound to fail. MacIntyre concludes by insisting that the term "human dignity" as used in modern parlance cannot be justified by appeals to justice and charity (MacIntyre 2021). It is his contention that the problem with the concept of intrinsic human dignity is the lack of rational justification that underpins it.

### 3.4. *The Fullness of Meaning Associated with the Original Concept: Creation in the Image of God*

Habermas's translation proviso argument misses the essential aspect of the dialogue of cultures and religions. Religious language is comprehensible to modern reason; it can be deciphered, like any language. What is at issue are the premises upon which religions—more specifically, each religion and each culture—stand upon, which are in dispute. What Habermas argues is that the translation of the biblical concept of humanity created in the image of God is, in fact, the reduction/truncation of the I-thou, or more particularly the "we", relationship of God and humanity into simply a "we" structure of humanity where the Logos of God is replaced by the logos of human language. This reduction reflects the wider reductions in metaphysical philosophy that are evident in Habermas's thought. For example, in the presuppositions of his communicative reason vis à vis the principles of practical reasoning espoused by Aquinas. Habermas's reinterpretation still relies on a "metaphysical" structure: that of the logos of human language. Here, God the Creator, Father Almighty, who is the first and final cause, is erased, leaving just the material and formal causes in search of explanation. The rationality of human reason in this structure is assumed. Reason, from Habermas's perspective, is innate. Reason precedes the human being in language and is disclosed through discursive communication in a linguistic community. Reason simply is. It is "reason as such" (see Stein 2000, pp. 6–35; McKenna 2024b). Why is that? On what basis can this be so? There is a gap here to be addressed.

Aquinas's model moved the highest Good from the city to God the divine Logos. Habermas's model, dispensing with God, moves the Logos to the intersubjective power of a self-referential logos of human language. There is a twofold movement here: the objective

measure of good and the Good is removed, and the distinction between human reason and divine reason is replaced by the intersubjectivity of the logos of human language. Habermas is, in some ways, returning to Periclean Athens, with primacy given to the demos, while also, in other ways, remaining within metaphysical thought through a logos—that of human language. In the return to Periclean Athens, it is the demos, through the self-referential logos of human language, who has the last word. Habermas's approach is not capable of demonstrating why and how the norms, which he insists are self-binding of the will, are reasonable and rational. They are what emerges from the self-referential logos of human language in the discursive process of will and opinion formation. "Why it is good?", and how it aligns to the truly human, can be and often is left unanswered in this discursive process of establishing norms.

For Habermas, Ratzinger, and MacIntyre, the understanding of the human being integrally informs the morality advocated. The structural framework, in which a transcending element gives form to both humanity and morality, is the determining factor. This may be why it would appear that the meaning of the biblical concept of humanity as created in the image of God is translatable into an atheistic parlance. Where it is thus translated, the biblical concept's reinterpretation in a post-metaphysical atheistic language lacks rational justification, because the philosophical and theological foundations to support the concept are absent; a re-appropriation without foundation. In this sense, it is understandable why Habermas would refer to impulses of meaning and moral feeling, but these are not simply impulses captured by religion; rather, they are the impulses of the real that resonate with those sensitive to the truth. Or, as Habermas, expresses it, "From the very beginning, the voice of God calling into life communicates within a morally sensitive universe" (Habermas 2003a, p. 115). As noted above, these impulses should be understood as impulses of conscience (Romans 2:13–16).

Evidently, from a Christian perspective, as demonstrated by Ratzinger and MacIntyre, the translation that Habermas proposes is unsatisfactory. Cristina Lafont is right to argue that the underpinning assumption of Habermas's translation proviso is problematic because it "presupposes that *it is possible to arrive at the same results by different epistemic means*" (Lafont 2007, p. 245; 2013). The impulses taken from the Christian tradition inform a secular understanding that is a significant distortion of the relational understanding of God, who is Logos and love, and the human being. In the absence of the divine, the fundamental structure and its associated meaning have no reference point, e.g., Logos and love, if, nonetheless, its meaning resonates. Human reason is capable of grasping the concept's original meaning. But, given its dependency on Christian faith and theistic theology, in which God is Creator and the first and final cause, an atheistic anthropocentric orientation is incapable of retaining the meaning of that concept; it does not have the structure to uphold and sustain it. The human being is then autonomous in the community of the atomized "we", rather than relational in communion with the "we" of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The intent here is not to dismiss post-metaphysical philosophy's assertions on human dignity. It is to question how modernity arrived at these claims such that they remain philosophically sound—that is, rationally justifiable, and not just assertions supported by the vagaries of social consensus. Habermas's translation of sacred concepts into the secular is an assimilation of the creative eternal reason of the Logos of God into the self-referential logos of human language—a logos of an entirely different nature. This means that the translation proviso is an invalid requirement of religion in the public sphere, because it is inadequate in its original intent. Translation is saying the same thing in a different language. It is not, nor can it be, a reinterpretation of what is said in the original language. The attempt to replace the absolute of the Logos of God with the intersubjective logos of human language, far from being a modern project, is a project as old as humanity itself (Genesis 3:1–22).

As MacIntyre points out through Aquinas, human beings' *dignitas* can be lost where the choices and actions of a rational agent no longer direct them to their final end—to know

and love God. Nonetheless, what is owed to them in justice and charity is ever-present. As a result, contemporary Catholic usage of the term “human dignity” retains sound philosophical foundations because it is based on an understanding of justice in a flourishing community. Whether that meaning is either appreciated or comprehended is not the point; the meaning stands in itself. Those adhering to the tradition have the task of expressing the philosophical and theological basis upon which it stands in a manner that is comprehensible to modern society. This includes the requirement to clearly communicate its distinction from other usages of the term “human dignity”. Eliciting from advocates of the modern usage of human dignity their definition of that term, and where appropriate highlighting the inconsistency and contradictions of that meaning, is a profoundly important service for contemporary society. While modern definitions of human dignity fall short of the Catholic meaning, it is better that that Catholic meaning informs the morality of modernity than not. For while it falls short of that sacred vision of the human being, the impulses taken up set a standard and an expectation that is aspired to, even if it is not established in a manner that gives the means for its achievement. In that engagement, as opposed to acceptance, the Christian faith must remain fully itself. Only in this way will the yeast continue to leaven the bread.

The perplexing nature of the human being who is “very good” (Genesis 1:31), but who nonetheless populates or exists in the scenario of so much incomprehensible evil and suffering, is an ever-present challenge for theology and philosophy, whether atheist, theistic, or religious. Habermas’s solution—that human beings must act in a manner that answers and overcomes evil, and that they must be responsible for salvation in world history in which “a last judgement is implacably deferred into the future”—asks too much of humanity (Habermas 2002, p. 161). Christianity sees in the God of Logos and love the means for healing fallen human nature. Jesus Christ reveals the full potential of the truly human. We live in the Fall, a reality that modern thought in part describes as structural discrimination. The individual person exists, and only can exist, in a community. “Adam” is comprehensible only in the context of all of the living, “Eve” (Genesis 1:26–28, 2:7, 20–25) (McKenna 2015a, 2020). The human being cannot be fully understood without other human beings. The “I” of each human being exists in the “we” of community. But how is the freedom of each “I” to be ordered in such a way that enables freedom to exist within the competing freedoms of the “we”, and allows each “I” to flourish in justice, becoming who they have it in them to become?

This is the question that underlies Habermas, Ratzinger, and MacIntyre’s considerations of the human being. It is the question of who we are and how we become fully human. In attempts to answer that question, the corruption of the will, in which, as Habermas observes in reference to Kierkegaard, “human beings who could know better do not *want* to understand”, should not distort nor divert from the perennial search for the truth of the human being (Habermas 2003b, p. 8), nor should it distort how that truth informs the search for how we live together in justice and peace. Habermas’s account of the human being, in rejecting the history of salvation, remains within the catastrophe of the Fall. It is the divine as Logos and love who heals damaged human love and points humanity to the salvation of the truly human. In Christ, the truly human is revealed as the person who is fully human and fully divine, without mixture, confusion, or separation. It is by participating in divinity, by transcending our limited human nature through our person by living in relation to God without reservation, that human beings are truly human (McKenna 2024c).

#### 4. Habermas’s Problem Statement and the Presupposition Proviso

Habermas’s translation proviso, while problematic, seeks to address legitimate questions. In states that are committed, or indeed not committed, to political equality in which incommensurable worldviews are held, how is deliberation to take place on binding political decisions? At the core of this question is a cluster of more fundamental questions: In a society where a multiplicity of philosophical and religious worldviews exists, what are the criteria for a validity claim to be legitimate and considered in the creation and refinement



of law? What makes these laws binding on citizens beyond the threat of enforcement? In other words, why should citizens respect those laws? And why should the state apparatus, being as it is made up of individual citizens, enforce those laws? These questions bring to the fore the question of reason and the nature of reason as rationality, these being central to the differences between Habermas, Ratzinger, and MacIntyre's perspectives on the role of religion in the public sphere and their interpretation of the human being. Jacques Derrida, in his 1983 article "The Principle of Reason: The University in the Eyes of its pupils", considers the role and place of reason in the university and, hence, in wider society (Derrida 1983). His line of thought, whose starting point is aligned with Habermas's, is more consistent with Ratzinger's and MacIntyre's concerns. A bridge between Christian thought and modernity exists in the shared space of the mutual search for the origin of reason. This offers a point of departure that insists on establishing the ground upon which convictions rest. It opens the way to the presupposition proviso.

#### 4.1. *The Origin and Grounds of Reason*

Derrida's starting point is that the university's reason for being has always been reason itself. No university has been established to be or to argue against reason. Derrida starts with Aristotle but moves quickly to the Enlightenment voices of Leibniz, Kant, and Heidegger. Derrida notes that in the history of reason the concept of reason has evolved from *logos* to *ratio*, *raison*, and that enlightenment understands reason in terms of "the principle of reason". The principle of reason, for Derrida, is based on Leibniz's first two principles of all reasoning: (1) that of non-contradiction, and (2) that of rendering reason, or in other words, that a reasoned account is possible of any truth or true proposition. Derrida maintains that reason rationally explains effects through their causes. He also insists that reason must give an account of its own roots. In that account the principle of reason cannot ground itself: reason cannot be the origin or grounds of reason. It is here that Derrida's concerns arise. He contends that the origin or grounds of reason have not yet been established by Enlightenment thought, nor is it a theme of research in contemporary universities. Not accounting for the origin of reason—the grounds upon which the principle of reason stands—means, for Derrida, that the contemporary university itself stands over an abyss, a hole, an empty gorge. Reason, then, like the university, "would have to hold itself suspended above a most peculiar void" (Derrida 1983, pp. 7–9).

In response to this void, Derrida seeks a community of thought in which reason is "only one species of thought", a species that is not reducible to a tool of science or philosophy. That community would subject reason to scrutiny and would interrogate reason's origin, value, and meaning. Through this process, interest-orientated research would be unmasked, and scholars could "undertake new analyses in order to evaluate these ends and to choose, when possible, among them all" (Derrida 1983, p. 16). An echo of Aquinas and MacIntyre is striking here. The community that Derrida seeks, based on Leibniz's first two principles of all reasoning, would respond to the call of reason to take responsibility to render reason, and thereby truth. Truth, for Derrida, is what preserves and is preserved (Derrida 1983, p. 20). That community would take responsibility to explore the intelligibility of truth and render rational accounts of what reason considers. In such a community, reason would not be a tool for those with the financial resources to acquire knowledge.

The common goal that Habermas, Ratzinger, MacIntyre, and Derrida share holds the possibility to transcend their very different accounts of reason. If that common goal structures dialogue, the desired outcome—an orderly, free, and just society that actively enables human flourishing—is the star towards which they journey together. Their presuppositions are then the starting point for agreeing where each commences that journey and forms the basis for any subsequent understanding and (dis)agreement. It is not necessary to share an understanding of reason for agreement or communication to occur.

#### 4.2. *The Presupposition Proviso: Dialogue and Legitimate Argument*

If we overlay MacIntyre's observation that it is pre-philosophical convictions that determine philosophical commitments upon Ratzinger/Benedict's and Derrida's questions on the origin of reason (why, or on what basis, is reason rational?), it becomes apparent that, in conjunction with the Golden Rule—treat others as you would like to be treated—clarity of thought and argument is essential for dialogue that moves beyond monologues. This clarity facilitates understanding, discussion, and the provision of reasonable justifications for positions and values held. Robust critiques can then be undertaken, and subsequent, considered responses provided. A method of deliberation that is truly accessible to all worldviews is established through a presupposition proviso. The presupposition proviso requires each worldview (whether primarily philosophical, theological, or religious) to clearly outline its pre-philosophical commitments, along with its underlying assumptions. In this way, each participant in the dialogue details the basis upon which their arguments stand and opens them to questions for clarifications. From there, unexpected points of convergence and divergence emerge.

The presupposition proviso eschews the progress narrative of modernity and facilitates a mutual exile of all citizens in the public sphere (Biggar 2009b, pp. 322–24). With no dominant worldview shaping the public sphere, each is in exile from its own worldview. Each is a stranger in a strange land. Each citizen travels into the land of exile in the public sphere to meet the other citizens. The mutual exile of the public sphere is one where everyone negotiates with foreigners and, thus, settles for fragments. This, as Biggar positions it, is not the adoption of political expediency; it is based on respect for one another as creatures and sinners that we see one another face to face. Disagreement is not the product of obduracy in the other. A measure of consensus is possible on what is good and right. Such a measure of consensus will produce a tense peace that can be kept but is never secure.

#### 4.3. *The Presupposition Proviso's Questions*

The presupposition proviso requires each participant in dialogue to provide answers to core philosophical questions. Peter Kreeft, in *The Greatest Philosophy who ever Lived*, outlines the basic question in each of the fourteen major areas of philosophy. The answers to these questions are the presuppositions of each philosophy or worldview. The questions are as follows: First, methodology—what methods or means are used? If the end of philosophy is wisdom, “what is the best means to achieve it?” Second, epistemology—what is knowing? The question of what is knowledge is the theoretical dimension, and methodology is the practical aspect. Third, logic—how are thoughts ordered in relation to one another? Fourth, metaphysics—what is Being? What is the nature of reality? What truths about reality are universal? Fifth, what can human natural reason know about God? Sixth, cosmology—what are the most fundamental principles of the material universe? Seventh, philosophical anthropology—what is and who is the human being? Eighth, philosophical psychology—what is the soul or psyche? Ninth, ethics—what is good for the human being? How should we live and behave to attain that good? Tenth, political philosophy—what is a good state? How should one live in a bad one? Eleventh, philosophy of history—what are the causal forces by which human history works? Twelfth, philosophy of education—how do we best educate our children? Thirteenth, aesthetics—what is beauty, both natural and artificial (art)? Fourteenth, philosophy of religion (which means “a binding relationship” between the human and divine dimensions)—what is the essence of religion, humanity's relationship with God? (Kreeft 2021, pp. 47–53).

For Kreeft, philosophy is the love of wisdom, and that goal is achieved by joining theory and practice, metaphysics and ethics. Mary, the mother of Jesus, is the greatest philosopher because, according to Kreeft, she loved wisdom itself. Mary is the mother of the Logos, Jesus Christ (Kreeft 2021, pp. 126–31, 150, 189–96).<sup>8</sup> Her life was defined by the disposition of patiently holding together the various events in her life without insisting upon an immediate apprehension of those things. “Mary kept all these things, pondering

them in her heart” (Luke 2:19, 52). If, as Kreeft argues, philosophy is a conversation commenced by Socrates that continues today, Mary is prefigured in philosophy by Socrates’ teacher Diotima of Mantinea. Diotima taught Socrates on love and beauty, that true love is the love of wisdom (Symposium 201d–212c).

Three additional questions to Kreeft’s list are to be added to the presupposition proviso: First, what is one’s definition of philosophy? Is it as per the meaning of the word “philosophy”, the love of wisdom? Is it the procurement of knowledge? Is it the conformity of the mind to real objects, or does the mind form and shape things in the act of knowing? In other words, is knowing discovery or creation? Or is it, whether philosophy or a worldview, something else, such as a mechanism for political stability? Second, an answer must be given to Derrida’s question; what is the origin or grounds of reason? Ratzinger, attempting to force this question on philosophy, put this same question in multiple different ways:

“The question is whether reason, or rationality, stands at the beginning of all things and is grounded in the basis of all things or not. The question is whether reality originated on the basis of chance and necessity . . . luck and cunning . . . from what is irrational; that is whether reason, being a chance by product of irrationality and floating in an ocean of irrationality, is ultimately just as meaningless”.

(Ratzinger 2004b, p. 181)

As noted, in his 2006 Regensburg address as Pope Benedict XVI, Ratzinger asked that same question in a different way: if the rational structure of matter is accepted as a given by the natural sciences, why is that given not also applied to the spiritual and human aspects of reality and existence? Third, as MacIntyre noted, an account of why and how the human being can ask, let alone answer, any of these questions must be provided. (MacIntyre 2009a, pp. 177–80). The presupposition proviso compels an answer to the question “who is the human being?”, from which all other presuppositions flow. At every turn, it is first a question of how the human being can claim a metaphysical structure or reject or deconstruct it. It forces a unity to the account of the human being, which incorporates the relationships of the present and the sequence of their very existence. It places each account in its proper context. The individual particular contingent human being gives an account of the human being. Everything flows from such an account. All philosophical questions depend upon and are determined by the account of how the human being can give an account of the human being.

#### 4.4. *A Burden Placed Equally upon All*

The presupposition proviso is reasonable and equitable. It is expected of all in every scenario. No one is being asked to do what others are not. The burden is placed equally on all. Everyone is presented with the same burden, to explain their own presuppositions and to offer clarifications to interlocutors. Each participant gives an account of their philosophical convictions, including the theological position and the pre-philosophical convictions that underpin it, and each participant has the right to interrogate the position of others. The ensuing outcomes will be shaped by the level of plurality that exists, or is allowed to exist, and the place held by religion in each society. The presupposition proviso is the means for communicating across groups who hold very different worldviews. Those worldviews become truly comprehensible when the bases of their philosophical and theological commitments are made clear. It is not the case that we cannot understand one another. It is simply that we have fundamentally different positions in intellectual starting points and, as a result, on the purpose, meaning, and goal of life. Making explicit the implicit so that what underpins the various philosophical viewpoints is evident provides the transparency of thought that forms the basis of any agreement. Agreement on the starting point of each participant is the basis of understanding. Communication and collaboration can then follow if the Golden Rule is adopted. Like Biggar’s mutual exile in the public sphere, the presupposition proviso is informed by Christian antecedents, which situates it in something significantly broader than the political democratic realm. A person—rather than system-centric dynamic is created, in which the person as an individual has the

space to live and behave as the image of God (Biggar 2023). Benedict XVI's questions to the cultures and religions of the world (McKenna 2022) catalyze a dynamic towards justice and peace that provides the presupposition proviso with guard rails for dialogue in the mutual exile of the public sphere.

In focusing on desired outcomes, the presupposition proviso is applicable beyond the traditions and cultures that emanate from Athens. For example, the metaphysical issue is not a barrier for the Eastern perspective but subsumed into the wider set of answers. Likewise, theological and religious perspectives must give an account of their own beliefs and worldviews. The role played by philosophy and science within each worldview becomes clear. Religion is rightly placed in the public sphere with the opportunity to contribute to and shape the ensuing discernment. This offers religion the opportunity to constructively engage in the public sphere without a distortion of its convictions. Importantly, the presupposition proviso is not dependent on a form of political governance, e.g., democracy, but is applicable to every type of political governance. In answering these seventeen questions, the clarity of thought on convictions and their antecedents becomes evident for each participant. From here, profound understanding and communication, if not agreement, is possible, from which collaboration can emerge.

It is reasonable to ask whether the presupposition proviso might serve as an effective means to bring discourse to a sudden end, given that the various presuppositions of different interlocutors could be seen by some to leave no common ground to start a conversation. An answer to that question can only be given by each individual interlocutor. Such an answer will be determined by the dialogical creativity that can be achieved by interlocutors. More importantly, it will be determined by whether the interlocutors prioritize collaborating together on shared goals and desired outcomes or instead insist that dialogue is based on one starting point that is determined by one of the interlocutors. If the presupposition proviso is embraced, an ever-emerging and renewed consensus on an orderly, free, and just society can then be rendered, facilitating the possibility that its members will flourish, becoming what they have it in themselves to become.

## 5. Conclusions: Oscillating between Periclean and Post-Periclean Athens

The West, and the world in general, finds itself oscillating between Periclean and post-Periclean society; between the hubris of the great Athenian city-state, with her economic alliance/empire, and the philosophy of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle that emerged from the political disarray and tyranny in the aftermath of Athens' defeat in the Peloponnesian War. In Habermas's pursuit of self-binding norms that are applicable to all, the ever-present challenge is to ensure that those norms do not descend into the arbitrary self-interests of individuals or of the polis. The Athenian citizen-soldier noted for his courage during the Peloponnesian War, a philosopher who wrote nothing, asked simple questions in search of true knowledge and true wisdom. Socrates, having asked simple questions of the great and the good of Athenian society in search of knowledge and wisdom, came away none the wiser. As the heir of Socrates, the contemporary world stands between Periclean and post-Periclean Athens, moving uneasily between the two. The presupposition proviso offers a mechanism to navigate these two worlds via robust dialogue, challenging questions and constructive critiques. Communication is anchored in understanding one another and agreement is predicated upon a willingness to collaborate together to achieve shared goals and desired outcomes.

The translation proviso, while problematic, raises important issues for both reason and religion in the public sphere. These issues relate to wider thought in general. Metaphysics, religions and post-, or indeed truncated, metaphysics must take up the critiques that each makes of the other to move beyond a zero-sum game of winners and losers. Reasonable questions of each remain open. Pursuing answers to these questions through the question "who is the human being?" forces a concreteness of thought that forestalls abstractions that can obviate engagement with the core issues. In this way, a more profound synthesis can be distilled, in which an appropriate "and" emerges from where there was an "either/or"

borne of unexplored possibilities (Kreeft 2023). This will illustrate the necessity of maintaining the inseparable unity of theology and philosophy in the ever-ongoing process of giving to Caesar and to God what is their own while pursuing the Good and the Just in the mutual exile of the public sphere. Only from that position can the question commenced with be pursued in earnest: in a society whose goal is an orderly, free, and just society, where citizens are given what they need to become what they have it in them to become, what is the basis for legitimate political argument?

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** Not applicable.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Not applicable.

**Data Availability Statement:** No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> This paper addresses open questions within a consideration of Habermas's approach to the human being and to religion, and to religion in society, included in the following papers: (McKenna 2019, 2024a, 2024b, 2024c). For consideration of the issues discussed in this paper, see also (McKenna 2015b, 2016, 2017, 2018).
- <sup>2</sup> Habermas's translation proviso takes up questions on the public use of reason in John Rawls' political theory. It rejects the respective arguments of Paul J. Weithman and Nicholas Wolterstorff that citizens have a right to justify their public political statements on religious grounds and that no institutional filter is required ahead of the creation and enactment of law, such that the ruling majority can base law on religious or confessional grounds.
- <sup>3</sup> The reader may want to reference other responses to Habermas's translation proviso that are both critical and supportive. Critical critiques include the following: (Rees 2018; Taylor 2011; Lafont 2007, 2013; Cooke 2013; Lima 2013; Adams 2006; Bretherton 2009). Supportive critiques include the following: (Aguirre 2013; Junker-Kenny 2009; Cummings 2017; Schmidt 2010).
- <sup>4</sup> The Hebrew word *adam* "is not to be understood as an individual named Adam; rather, 'the Human' is the whole of humanity". (Viviano 1985, p. 15). Or, as the 2004 letter "On the Collaboration between Men and Women" notes in relation to Genesis 1:27 ("God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them"): "From the very beginning therefore, humanity is described as articulated in the male-female relationship. This is the humanity, sexually differentiated, which is explicitly declared 'the image of God'. It also notes that in the second creation account in Genesis 2:7 the 'generic expression *Adam*' is used to describe the created human being (The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith 2004, para. 5, 6).
- <sup>5</sup> In the prologue to the third edition of *After Virtue* published in 2007, MacIntyre acknowledges that when he published the first edition of *After Virtue* in 1981 he was still an Aristotelian, "not yet a Thomist" (MacIntyre 2007, p. x).
- <sup>6</sup> MacIntyre rightly points to the controversy surrounding the Mother and Child Scheme in Ireland in the early 1950s as a notorious example of morality driven by its negative rather than positive precepts. He argues that this type of morality is to a large degree responsible for the collapse of Catholicism in Ireland. It is certainly correct that such morality discredits and discredited Catholic morality. The Mother and Child Scheme's failure can be seen as a symptom of other forces that were to lead to the collapse of Catholicism in Ireland. The collapse of Catholicism in Ireland must be placed in a much wider context, which would include three critical trends: First, the end of the Cold War meant that the United Kingdom no longer held a strategic interest in Northern Ireland, opening the way for a political settlement for the six counties. This, in turn, transformed the hostile relationship between Ireland and the UK, releasing the need for Catholicism to bolster Irish identity. Second, Ireland underwent an economic transformation such that Irish society transitioned from being a society dominated by agriculture, poverty, and emigration to a wealthy society and hub of multiple international companies. Third, the catastrophic handling of child sexual abuse at the diocesan level and by religious orders raised serious questions about the Christianity of Catholic Ireland.
- <sup>7</sup> From the discussion in Sections 2 and 3 it is clear why MacIntyre argues that not only does Aquinas express disagreement with Aristotle, with that disagreement at times being significant, but that Aquinas does not automatically prioritize Aristotle's philosophy. MacIntyre notes that, although Aquinas adapts Aristotle's definition of the virtues, he follows Plato and Cicero's scheme for the relationship of the four cardinal virtues to one another. Likewise, in relation to justice, he unified Aristotle, Cicero, and Augustine's definitions of justice into a single, albeit complex, account of justice. Critically, nothing was accepted from philosophy that was at odds with Scripture. Indeed, Aquinas integrated Aristotelian elements into a Pauline and Augustine framework, so that his synthesis was not just an integration of Christian elements into the Aristotelian framework (MacIntyre 1988, pp. 164–208). See in particular MacIntyre's summation in paragraphs two and three on page 205.



- <sup>8</sup> In his description of Mary, Kreeft, following Aquinas, equates the female or woman with femininity—specifically, femininity as defined by Aristotle. While Aquinas rightly moves Aristotle’s highest good from the city to God, he failed to undertake the parallel necessary move for humanity, from Aristotle’s dichotomy of masculinity and femininity to the relational human being created in the image of God as male and female. Ratzinger, as Prefect (Head) of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, in the 2004 letter “On the Collaboration between Men and Women”, addressed this issue. Stating that masculinity and femininity are both *human* traits, of which men and women are signs, masculinity and femininity are relocated to the human being. Each human being, male and female, has both masculine and feminine traits. This relocation of masculinity and femininity to the human being is a Scriptural interpretation of the creation of humanity (Gen 1:27) and the human being (Gen 2: 7, 21–22) as the image of God. This approach fully retains the theological and spiritual implications of biology while ensuring that the interpretation of the human being, created as *male* and *female*, reflects the data of Scripture (The Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith 2004, para. 16, 14, 6, footnote 5).

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