

# Persistent Postmodern Numino-Political Analysis

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## ABSTRACT

This article addresses post-Cold War theological discourses in relation to socio-political action. It seeks to demonstrate the limitations of modern Behaviouralism which either excludes theology or pigeonholes it within a purely materialist schema. It also proposes a theological framework for investigating socio-political activity in context of a transcendent order. This involves the advocacy of the position known as Radical Orthodoxy in which postmodern thought is freed from the constraints of modernity. (Editor)

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***“... those who thought that religion and politics could be kept separate,  
understood neither religion nor politics ...”***

*Mohandas K. Gandhi*

## Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War, trying to discern the thing that makes religious actors tick has left many social researchers baffled. Whilst the violent re-entry of religion in the public sphere in recent years has given fresh impetus to the enterprise, commentary that sought to make sense of either the liberative or bellicose potential of religion has been startling for its lack of clarity. Such ambiguity has resulted in anything associated with religion, be they institutions, ideas or groupings, being caught in this nebulous conceptual web of violence. Any “discussion” between and religious discourses often ends up becoming a plethora of monologues bypassing each other with little, if any, contact. Because an interesting question then arises as to the influence of such esoteric articulations and their relationship with the socio-political action that is often the visible criteria by which religion as a whole is judged, a key task of the analyst thus becomes one of establishing traction between the political and religious discourses.

This article begins by canvassing two broad schools of analysis, Modern behaviouralism and Constructivism. While recognising the capacities of the latter in exposing the constraints of the former's logic of autonomy, aspects of this "postmodern" approach that replicate this Modern logic actually inhibits the ability of Social Constructivism to incorporate the numinous aspects of religious actors into research frameworks. Arguing for a more thorough postmodernism paves the way to consider the inclusion of another variable, that of transcendent order, into research frameworks. While some analysts have undertaken this somewhat brazen research trajectory, the vestiges of Modernity inherent in these models arguably impair any thoroughgoing engagement with the numinous aspect that analysis into the logic of religious actors demands. In closing, this article proposes Radical Orthodoxy, as a possible analytical entry point into the subject of the numinous which at the same time rejects any entanglement in the Cartesian web.

### **The Behavioural Limits**

The search for answers into the questions raised by the resurgence of religion often initially canvasses the possibilities of conventional approaches of behaviouralism<sup>1</sup>, centred on issues of management and institution building. However, the sheer volume of literature that discrediting this prevailing orthodoxy is often sufficient to dissuade any author from further engagement. For the vast bulk of the literature, a common starting point in projects critical of the prevailing orthodoxy is to point out the flaws of post-Enlightenment Modernity, from which the prevailing orthodoxies stem (Thomas 2005:54-63). What becomes apparent upon more thorough examination of this critical literature is that inherent in these dominant methodologies is a near total reliance on the primacy to rational interest-maximisation. One cannot ignore powerful critiques posed by postmodern and critical theorists against one of Modernity's major assertions which makes the concept of rational interest maximisation possible, that of an extra-contextual, value-neutral, Archimedean insight into an objectively real world that trumps all others. The problematic nature this important underpinning of much of contemporary theorising becomes clearer if one considers the writings of Alasdair MacIntyre.

Doubting the Kantian notion of “rationality” as “autonomous... [with a] history... [that] can be written without much reference to the history of anything else (Knight 1998:106)”, MacIntyre considered it

an illusion to suppose that there is some neutral standing ground, some locus for rationality as such, which can afford rational resources sufficient for enquiry independent of all traditions. Those who have maintained otherwise...have simply been in error (MacIntyre 1988:367)

This is a view consistent with Hans-Georg Gadamer, who writing almost a decade before MacIntyre, hinted at limitations that exist even in the freest of human existence, the truth of which would mean then that

the idea of an absolute reason is impossible for historical humanity...it is not its own master, but remains constantly dependent on the given circumstances in which it operates (Gadamer 1979:245)

Of course the question then arises: If a “view from nowhere” does not exist in its own right, where then does “rationality” exist? Returning to *Whose Justice?*, MacIntyre lays the foundation of his work on virtue ethics by first stressing that “rationality” is a term that must be embedded in some prior dynamic, since it is that dynamic that gives the word meaning.

To be a rational individual is to participate in such a form of social life and to conform, so far as is possible, to those standards. It is because and insofar as the *polis* is an arena of systematic activity of just this kind that the *polis* is the locus of rationality (Knight 1998:116).

For MacIntyre’s, that prior dynamic lies in a “social life” to which a rational individual conforms, a model very different to the one put forward by Modernity. The “social life” here, is one where “concepts were conveyed through its histories”. For MacIntyreans, an actor must know who it is before it knows what it wants, but such an identity must necessarily be underpinned by some living social and cultural tradition, one that is shaped by any given combination of particularist philosophies, cultures, religions and mythologies, and is able to transmit the knowledge inherited from one generation to the next (Somers 1994:606, 618). John Rawls, having initially defended his

concept of the “original position” which regards all situations “not only from all social but also from all temporal points of view (Rawls 1972:587)”, would later regard as more persuasive a narrative account that which acknowledged the embeddedness of his “original position”, opining that

[w]hat justifies a conception of justice is not its being true to an order antecedent and given to us, but its congruence with our deeper understanding of ourselves and our aspirations, and our realisation that, given our history and traditions embedded in our public life, it is the most reasonable doctrine for us (Rawls 1980:518-9).

If that were the case, then MacIntyre’s opens a new field of enquiry with this claim: that for rationality to be understood in its fullest sense, it must be understood as a rationality that is embedded in a prior theme. To try and remove from consciousness the relevance of prior theme led to the paradoxical result of imposing a theme in its place, one assuming itself to be superior in terms of intellectual sophistication (Bellah 1970a; Derrida 1998:14; Milbank 2006:2).

But can these prior dynamics be explored by the traditional methodological orthodoxy? With the insistence that only the scientifically tested phenomenon is knowable, the tendency to let the methodology determine the subject results in a rationalistic rejection of the metaphysical as irrational, unprovable opinion (Voegelin 1952:4). Such approaches proceed unaware of secular modernity’s positing of itself as the epitome of political neutrality, itself represents a political act, through its forcing of an opinionated political position as not one of myriad independent political discourses but as their very foundation, then defining on its own terms the proper subjects of inquiry, in a manner that is far from apolitical (Cox 1986:209; Hurd 2004:239, 245; Neufeld 1995). Through Louis Herman (1997), the reader can become aware of the machinations of conventional social scientific analysis, and their limitations. The problematic nature of the methodological orthodoxy becomes manifest in the compartmentalisation of the once organic and interlinked aspects of human experience followed by the reification of those compartments into self-sufficient concepts bounded with congealed conceptual membranes and

going even further, reducing any relationship such concepts may have to one another in terms of mutual opposition, and prescribing a hierarchical treatment which counts as “good” the seemingly measurable, objective and rational aspects of humanity as experienced in the temporal sphere, and treats as anathema the subjective, immeasurable, and thus irrelevant esoteric experiences of the supernatural (Herman 1997:78-80).

Some may regard hermeneutical analysis into religious actors as imperative in a post-9/11 age. But to do using methods that simultaneously disengage the religious underpinnings from other aspects of the actor’s total experience *and* deny that underpinning any kind of cognitive validity, despite its centrality to the inquiry, is eventually a self defeating exercise. But perhaps the more fundamental problem rests in the fact that the scientism of the social sciences often lead to a (deliberate?) failure to appreciate the possibility of religious discourses actually seeking to transcend essentially materialistic political and economic concerns. Whilst such concerns may be the first point of contact with religious discourses, it only serves as a prelude to rearrange such issues in supernatural grounding (Burrige 1969:108), and in so doing tackle a variable that has been central to Western thinking in the wake of the disasters of the twentieth century, namely the issue of meaning (Dallmayr 2004:251; Henningsen 2000:810-2; Singh 1985:391-4), whether of the isolated events of life, or even that of life itself (Casey 2001:1; Euben 1997:430). The Modern avoidance of metatheoretical analysis that made sense of the need for meaning, meant that such a need was either left unfulfilled by the prescriptions of scientific processes, or dealt with by simply denying it legitimacy (Lapid 1996:9). Both solutions fly in the face of much historical data whereby actors have implemented socio-political programs with this very need in mind (Voegelin 1997:225).

### **Meaning & the “Lightness” of Constructivism?**

Many argue that the search for meaning raises the prospects of constructivism sufficiently broadening the contours of orthodox political inquiry so as to encompass this prior dynamic. To its credit, constructivism has made

inroads in transcending the context-free rationality that underpins the prevailing orthodoxy, and bringing meaning back the forefront of their research agenda (Reus-Smit 2001:217), by contending meaning to be constitutive of a socially constructed, underpinning identity (Bellah 1970b; Giddens 1991:35), which in turn inform interests and prescribe actions (Wendt 1992:398). The constructivist insistence on identity has paved the way for the consideration of the dimensions of the human condition deemed “irrelevant” in the analysis of the prevailing orthodoxy, not the least of which are cultural and religious variables. As such, it is often assumed that with such a substantial conceptual widening, constructivism would be able to undertake analysis into the cultural dynamics that underpin much of the contemporary “identity”. Upon closer scrutiny, however, one can legitimately question whether constructivism can actually provide an adequate theoretical understanding of the religious variable in its entirety, which includes not merely the systems of meaning, but also the “inexplicable”, numinous object for which the search for meaning is meant to engender new respect (Bauman 1993:33).

One can see complications emerging after considering the most recent contributions on constructivism by Scott Thomas. Whilst acknowledging the positive contributions of the approach, Thomas criticised constructivism in its current state as having an “almost unbearable lightness (Thomas 2005:93)”. He, like Reus-Smit, agrees that constructivism recognises the behaviour of actors as the result of the marriage of social interaction with widely accepted norms and practices (Reus-Smit 2002:131). However, Thomas critiques the constructivist turn in political theory as merely shifting the stasis from the state level to the ideational. Put another way, Thomas criticises the failure of constructivism to adequately inquire as to how such norms and practices originated, or how or why they become internalised by particular political actors in particular ways. Constructivists thus emphasise the salience of social constructions, but then gloss over the actual content of those constructions, or for the reason behind such constructions.

In citing reasons for such reticence, one could point to the current manifestations of postmodernism and its flow-on effects on Constructivism. In

its zeal to provide a more pluralistic political space, current postmodern approaches exposed a major flaw through its insistence of on everything being, as Richard Rorty puts it, “a product of time and chance (Rorty 1989:xv)”. This claim has often been translated into an ethical stance of suspicion of “meaning” being anything beyond a fragmentary and transient variable (Hughes 2003:14)”. The association of totalising cognitive projects with tyranny yields a distillate of strong opposition to totalising conceptualisations of the “whole” of human experience that, at least for religious actors, incorporates both temporal and numinous. This creates similarities between Modernity and postmodernity in the latter’s Cartesian dichotomising and hierarchicising of human experience, giving priority to the various isolated parts of a person’s existence against existence as a whole (Herman 1997:81). Moreover, current postmodern approaches, coupled with this suspicion of totalising projects, often manifest themselves in a superficial visitation of the divine sphere, only to conceptually fold that sphere back (and exclusively) onto some temporal dynamic. This can be exemplified in the centring of the experiences of religious actors, and their underpinning metaphysics, around the notion of “identity”, or the Foucauldian tendency to treat metaphysical claims as cynical exercises in strategic power projection (Bernstein 1986:206). This results in what Fred Dallmayr observed as a tendency in postmodernism “to celebrate a purely speculative otherness while stubbornly shying away from any contact or engagement with a concrete ‘other’ (Dallmayr 1993:203)”.

At best, constructivism in this light would appear to be a method of analysis that lacks the incisiveness to quarry the depths of religious meaning, and synthesise these variables into a cohesive framework. At worst, it is argued that in the absence of any underpinning account behind the formation of any identity, religious or otherwise, the conceptual focus is placed squarely back onto the agency of the actor. Jonathan Fox and Shmuel Sandler assert that whilst both parents of constructivism, critical theory and postmodernism acknowledge the salience of ideas (even the transcendent), they are still “in man’s mind and under his control”. This tendency feeds into constructivism and makes decisive not the cognitive factors, but rather the actor as an

autonomous rational agent (Fox and Sandler 2004:30). This in turn implies the formation and adoption of various identities to be little more than strategic choices with the aim of fulfilling self-centred desires, despite accounts by constructivists that such identity constructs are rarely adopted as the result of a purely rational exercise (Pasic 1996:86). This of course leaves culture and religion back at the margins of relevance (Pasic 1996:88).

So if the persistence of the Modern differentiation and dichotomisation of human experience in an attempt to find a reducible human behavioural distillate, renders the constructivist assertion that “identities are the basis of interests” a distortion, how does one overcome this foundational problem? How can a method of analysis give due consideration to the sphere in which culture and religion, so central in gaining an understanding of religious actors, reside, in order to avoid the caricature of political science “fiddl[ing] while Rome burns (Strauss 1962:327)”?

### **The Quest for Transcendent Order**

If the MacIntyrean ruminations considered above are correct, a strong argument can be put forward that, more than merely fulfilment of self-serving interests, political actors have as one of their essential aims when engaging in socio-political activity, not merely the acquisition of a stable launchpad to enable the confident fulfilment of interests, but also a sense of locatedness within some theme that precedes that identity launchpad. Also, rather than a disparate collection of fragments of meaning, this theme in order to give the kind of holistic meaning, has to be a totalising concept which gives cohesion to separate and unrelated events, even to the point where an actor can acquire comprehension of “the ultimate truths pertaining to the whys and wherefores of human existence and history (Hughes 2003:19)”. This of course necessitates the source of meaning to be an ultimate and exhaustive one. To talk of the acquisition of meaning then, one must talk of the “quest for and conception of the symbolic order...and of the quest for participation in such an order (Eisenstadt 1968:xii)”.



The inclusion of order as a relevant variable can provide promising inroads in the enterprise of understanding the religious logic of religious actors. But what becomes problematic here is the great temptation by analysts to refer to the order that is exhaustively rooted in the temporal sphere. This was the conclusion drawn by Emile Durkheim when he declared that the religious life is an eminently social one (Durkheim 1995). This tendency to fold the seemingly transcendent aspects of religion back into purely temporal experiences, and make the former contingent on the latter, is also borne out in more recent works such as Robert Pape's *Dying to Win*. In speaking of the social logic of suicide bombings Pape apparently reduces the significance of the martyrology associated with suicide terrorism to that of community approval. This is encapsulated by his assertion that "only a community can make a martyr (Pape 2005:82)". Such arguments beg the question as to whether social embeddedness itself constitutes a self-sufficient goal for the search for meaning. Indeed, the much deeper question concerns whether an exhaustive source of meaning can be found in the temporal sphere alone. Given, as was said earlier, the consideration of socio-political issues as subordinate to more primary supernatural frames of reference, can one determine the object of the order in which they participate to be purely terrestrial and anthropocentric? The post-World War II philosopher Jacques Maritain seemed to suggest in *Religion and Culture* that, whilst it is true that religious order guides one's steps on this earth, such order nonetheless had as its ultimate object "things far in excess of the requirements of any nature that ever was or ever could be created (Maritain 1931:9)". Other philosophers have similarly pointed the direction that our analysis must take, for in Wittgenstein's words "the solution of the riddle of life in space and time lies outside of space and time (Wuthnow 1987:40)<sup>2</sup>". But we have thus far established that current manifestations of social science cannot take this transcendent divine object seriously, given that their very foundations ignore this divine object before study into it even begins. If the key lies in meaning embedded in order, and if analysing that order necessitates transcending the temporal sphere, what frameworks can enable the analyst to at once engage both the actions of religious actors, and transcendental dynamics that animate such action?

Max Weber provides a possible inroad. Indeed, Weberian ideas are a step in the right direction, given Weber's recognition of the salience of both meaning, and of an extra-temporal sphere which provides that meaning (Hamilton 1995:137; Weber 1985). However, in analysing the relationship between the religious and political sphere, Weberian frameworks evince problems, suggested most incisively by Roxanne Euben. Her reading of Weber suggests that he regards involvement in the spiritual life as part of a set of inherently incompatible strands: a "this-worldly" strand where religious life necessitates contempt for the temporal sphere, which cancels out participation in the other, "other-worldly" strand where the spiritual life so inextricably entwined with the temporal that the latter eclipses the former (Euben 1997:432; Hamilton 1995:143-5). One may find such Weberian understandings unable to encompass the entirety of spiritual experience, as well as incompatible with the subjective understandings of a great variety of religious actors and their subjective conceptualisation of the two spheres. In other words, so long as reliance on Weberian conceptions that see the spiritual and the temporal worlds as the mutually exclusive "sacred" and "profane" persists, the analyst may remain unable to hermeneutically understand, for example, the Carmelite Monastic tradition, which prescribes withdrawal from the temporal sphere, but only as a means to engage it yet again, but in an ostensibly richer way.

Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann's *The Social Construction of Reality*, however, provides a more promising avenue to explore this phenomenon. According to Berger and Luckmann, the world as experienced by any actor is not an objective "real" world as such, but the result of a process of social projections which later coalesce into a reified world that stands outside the subjectivity of the individual and imposes itself on the individual to the point that the latter must adjust his or her activity to the former (Berger and Luckmann 1967). Whilst this seems almost identical to constructivist models, what sets Berger and Luckmann apart is the notion that this process occurs whilst being nestled in concentric frames of increasingly comprehensive meaning, ultimacy of which resting in what he calls the "symbolic universe". Promising as this model might be, however, it is not without its problems. The most pressing is

the circularity of the process of world creation so central to the model, which leaves silent the issue on how exactly the religious underpinnings infuses meaning into and maintain the social world, neither does he provide any insight as to the source of these religious insights into the social world apart from the social world itself. While his “symbolic universe” is referred to as transcendent, it is only to the extent that it transcends “everyday reality”, rather than complete temporal reality. What is more, *Social Construction* describes symbolic universes as merely a “matrix of all *socially* objectivated and subjectively real meanings (emphasis is the author’s)”, thereby sourcing all ultimate meaning of temporal experience back onto the temporal sphere (Berger and Luckmann 1967:113-4). This point is not insignificant, for one cannot logically derive a framework that is supposed to provide cohesion exclusively from a social world that is characterized by a lack of a framework.

Because Berger asserts that religion stems from participation in the life of the social temporality world, there might arise the Durkheimian impression of religion as merely a symbolic method of participation in the events of this temporal world and no other (Wuthnow et al. 1984:10). Indeed, in *The Heretical Imperative*, Berger himself contends that this is not the case.

to say that religion is a human projection [as he did in the *Social Construction* and later the *Social Reality*] does not logically preclude the possibility that the projected meanings may have an ultimate status independent of man (Berger 1969:180).

Whilst such an assertion of the transcendent as a non-contingent variable puts him apart from many other constructivists who make these projected meanings as but a residual and contingent element of predominantly temporal concerns. But as to the exact relationship between his constructed “reality” and this enigmatic variable which “ultimate status independent of man”, Berger does not provides a clear answer, save that it is a human enterprise to deify certain objects of temporal experience (Berger 1973:34).

It should become evident that hermeneutical understanding of religious actors is dependant on not just a radical expansion of conceptual horizons to encompass the temporal and spiritual spheres, but also a radical

harmonisation of those two spheres into a coherent framework. In this regard, another possible step in the right direction is exemplified by Eric Voegelin, who asserted that

[e]very society is organised for survival in the world and, at the same time, for participation in the order of being that has its origin in world-transcendent divine Being; it has to cope with the problems of its pragmatic existence and, at the same time, it is concerned with the truth of its order (Voegelin 2000:68).

This Voegelinian conception of history is key to our understanding of the religious component of religious peacemaking, for it puts that transcendent component into the very foundations of the research agenda. It is unlike the constructivist conception of socio-political action, where the search for meaning is treated as but an element of the quest for the rational fulfilment of interests, an approach which has proven inadequate for reasons stated above. Voegelinian conception of politics provides space for the serious engagement with the transcendent, since he acknowledges that it has been the historical source of the creation and maintenance of these webs of meaning to actions taken in the temporal sphere, but in a way that is unlike Weberian frameworks, for the two spheres are not seen as mutually exclusive but symbiotic. In other words, Voegelinian versions equate all socio-political action as being simultaneously participating in both temporal and numinous spheres, in a sort of *metaxic* “in-between” space where the two spheres overlap. Thus, in order to comprehensively understand temporal action, Voegelinian models demand engagement with coinciding transcendental dynamics.

It could be submitted that the incorporation of Voegelin’s framework at the foundations of social scientific research also overcomes the circularity of Bergerian frameworks canvassed above, by understanding his social construction as set against a backdrop of a simultaneous participation in the divine arena. However, it would be premature to regard Voegelinian foundations as the end to this search. Despite the great conceptual leap that Voegelin allows, such models evince one major shortfall: that whilst Voegelin emphasises openness to transcendent experience in *general*, he rejects

*particular* encapsulations of the transcendent experience. Historians of Voegelin point to his caution against the codification of transcendent experience in doctrine, which not only impeded accessing the *essence* of the transcendent experience which is a “predogmatic reality of knowledge (Voegelin 1978)”; whilst acknowledging the practical purposes of doctrine, it was the over-reliance on doctrine rather than experience, Voegelin argued, that contributed to the slide into the doctrinaire ideologies of the eighteenth, nineteenth and more relevantly, twentieth centuries, whose cost to humanity seemed to outweigh the benefits. In seeking this pre-dogmatic reality of knowledge, however, critics argue that Voegelin essentially leaves the description of content of transcendent order, or the “course” of history that was the above mentioned *metaxic* meeting point as a “mystery”, or “divine flux (Federici 2002:169)”. Because it is a mystery, “Thou shalt not rest in conclusion[s of the mystery] lest thou fall into certitude, the unforgivable sin against openness (Federici 2002:172)”. This opposition to certitude is mirrored in some strands of postmodern theology, like John D. Caputo. Whilst critical of post-Enlightenment rationality, Caputo echoed the anti-dogmatism of Voegelin, rejecting the propriety of taking seriously the particular articulations of transcendence in theology. Specificity in articulation of the divine, argued Caputo, is always tainted by arrogance and violence and is thus antithetical to the freedom that experience of transcendence demands (Caputo 2001:307). The effect of this thrust is like that of constructivism mentioned before, either a refusal or reluctance to quarry the actual content of particular expressions of the transcendent experience. The net result of this kind of reluctance would be to once again, albeit unintentionally, render the transcendent as another form of disengaged “Platonism”. This point was hinted at by Voegelin Scholar Gerhart Niemeyer. The reason behind the rejection of the content of doctrine is not so much the doctrine in and of itself, but rather the fact that “Voegelin has approached a great spiritual reality from a standpoint extraneous to it”. Putting Niemeyer’s point into even sharper focus, Harold Weatherby and Bruce Douglass, argue in sympathy with Niemeyer, that this reluctance to quarry arises from Voegelin’s complete reliance on philosophical discipline to analyse an essentially theological reality (Federici 2002:170).

A more fundamental critique can be gleaned from James K.A. Smith's thoughts on Caputo's idea of "religion without religion". While the motivations for providing a counter to the worst forms of fundamentalism are correct, the premises from which Caputo and Voegelin base their rejection of particularist articulations of the transcendent are essentially replications of the Modernity that they seek to overcome. If Smith is correct, both Caputo and Voegelin actually accept the Modern Cartesian framework surrounding the issue of epistemological certainty, that is, accepting the Cartesian dichotomy of either being in a position of omniscience or complete ignorance in relation to a subject (Pickstock 2000:63; Smith 2006:118). While to deal with this issue of the philosophy of language would be beyond the scope of this article<sup>3</sup>, it can be asserted that to comprehensively transcend the Modernity of the methodological orthodoxy would mean also to reject the Cartesian logic of determination, equating knowledge with omniscience, and take seriously a logic of incarnation, where one can not know everything on a subject, but at least know the parts of the subject that that has been revealed to the inquirer (Smith 2002).

We arrive here at a very crucial, yet at the same time, highly controversial point: This paper seeks to provide a response to Mark Juergensmeyer's call to adopt a "cultural approach" that "reconstruct[s]...world views from within (Juergensmeyer 2003:13)" and in so doing have a better "appreciation for religion itself" to find a cure for religious violence (Juergensmeyer 2003:249). But methodologically, it would be futile to fully explore such these sources, however open they are to the transcendent ground of which theology is an expression, so long as they do not seriously engage the specific articulations of theology as a concrete expression of the transcendent. This state of affairs will persist so long as the topic of bispheric action is engaged from a position of a social scientist (or even a philosopher?), which proceeds from standpoints external to the project of theologising and which, as the explorations in this chapter suggest, may be a futile exercise. At the same time, undertaking a hermeneutical approach that is coupled with a deep suspicion of particularity risks asserting an indeterminacy which makes any engagement with the concrete content of religious sources impossible.

It is here that Thomas' nod to Radical Orthodoxy becomes our way forward. Indeed, Radical Orthodoxy's ontology is consistent with that of Voegelin, in so far as meaning in temporality only existing insofar as temporality is suspended from the transcendent and the immaterial (Smith 2004:75). Because Radical Orthodoxy proceeds from a rejection of the Cartesian equation of knowledge with omniscience, however, this theological tendency, unlike Voegelin and Caputo, is able to locate in the very particular and finite expressions of "doctrine" that *metaxic* experience of the transcendent (Crockett 2001:35). Because of this, no longer need the experience be defined as a mysterious "divine flux" in an attempt to somehow maintain an indeterminate transcendence that is at the same time universally immanent. Whilst maintaining the universal may be a valid effort, doing so through the avoidance of particularity is not, since it replicates the versions of postmodernism that in turn replicates Modern dichotomies. Also, as Pickstock reminds us, a metaxic mode of participation necessitates the universal to be accessible via cleaving to "specific, time-bound [and] traditional" particularity. Indeed, for Pickstock, and for others in the Radical Orthodoxy tradition, this cleavage to particularity is the very thing that enables "participation in the true universal which is transcendent and inaccessible". "In disdain of particularity", says Pickstock, "one actually loses the universal irrevocably (Pickstock 2000:175)". The advantage of Radical Orthodoxy over Voegelinian conceptualisation thus lies in its serious engagement with the particular, in this case, theology as expressions of the transcendent. The content of theology becomes a concrete locus of analysis into the logic of the religious actors from which such theology springs forth.

## **Conclusion**

This article has only skimmed the surface of some foundational conceptual issues concerning attempts to make sense of religious actors. It has proceeded on a twofold claim that in order to hermeneutically understand the thing that makes religious actors tick, one first had to engage the religious

variable in its fullness. This led to the second claim that in order to fully engage the religious variable, one had to engage the sphere in which the object of the religious variable resided. Proceeding from those two claims meant that the social scientist would inevitably encounter conceptual hurdles. In conventional approaches, the hurdles stem from an autonomous rationality that from the start shuts out the religious variable. That the explanatory focus of such approaches often leads to a fragmentation of the entirety of human experience, and that providing cohesion through an exploration into the meaning of those experiences, meant that the religious variable could not be just slotted into the analytical process without some conceptual widening. However, so long as reticence in acknowledging that meaning had to be part of a comprehensive narrative led to the twofold result of shying away from the numinous object of religious activity, and like its conventional counterparts, allowed the re-emergence of the spectre of a disembodied “rationality”. Ensuring that such a spectre would remain buried meant that to speak of meaning, one had to speak of order. But unlike earlier writers who took all order to be exhaustively rooted in temporality, the author has argued instead for a religious order that incorporates and synthesises both the temporal realm in which socio-political activity takes place, and the transcendent realm from which meaning is injected into those actions.

Coming to a comprehensive synthesis, however, requires casting off the vestiges of Cartesian logic still inherent in current postmodern manifestations, which included the rejection of the argument that openness to the transcendent must be coupled by a persistent suspicion of articulations of that transcendence. It has been argued that a thoroughgoing postmodern Radical Orthodoxy can provide a key analytical entrance into this contentious subject. The trajectory of such study can enable the creation of sophisticated inroads into a growing literature that not only critiques traditional models that shut themselves off from the transcendent just as a growing proportion of political activity treats the transcendent as a given; its significance can also stem from its potential to provide alternatives that constructively engage these ideational others on their own terms.



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<sup>1</sup> The author takes its cue from Tow, William. 2003. "Apocalypse Forever? International Relations Implications of 11 September." *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 49(3):314-325., 317-22.

<sup>2</sup> I have bracketed Wittgenstein's other claim, that because one cannot know what lies outside of space and time one necessarily had to pass over it in silence, for some consideration below. My addressing of it here would be beyond the scope of this article and thus would be far from satisfactory.

<sup>3</sup> A much more comprehensive take on this issue can be found in Smith, James K A. 2002. *Speech and Theology: Language and the Logic of Incarnation*. London: Routledge.

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