Post-religious World and Religion: Toward the Concept of Translation of Jürgen Habermas

Wojciech Szczerba iD https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4265-506X

Evangelical School of Theology, Wrocław
Von Hügel Institute, St Edmund's College, University of Cambridge
e-mail: w.szczerba@ewst.pl, wzs21@cam.ac.uk

Abstract

This article refers to the broad concept of demythologization understood as a hermeneutic process referring mainly to religious-mythical messages. Demythologization aims to preserve and communicate the profound content of a religious statement by detaching it from its original, often anachronistic form and placing it in a form comprehensible to people living in a different cultural context. Among several contemporary thinkers continuing the tradition of broadly understood demythologization, Jürgen Habermas is of particular relevance to this article. Habermas points out that modern Western liberal societies are based on the modern concepts of democracy, individual freedom, and religious pluralism. The natural consequence of such social development is the process of secularization. In his 2001 speech *Glauben und Wissen*, Habermas points to religion as an essential ally of the liberal, civic state against the "alienating forces of modernity." Religion, in his view, is an integral part of Western culture both in a historical-cultural sense and in the ever-present potential for meaning contained in religious language. Habermas advocates a translation of the moral intuitions contained in religious language into a secular language that would be acceptable to the public and that could help to build civic societies and civic attitudes. The concept of *imago Dei*, which contains the universal truth of the unconditioned dignity of the human being, can serve as an example.

Keywords: post-secularism, post-religious society, society, civic society, religion, demythologization, Bultmann, Habermas, hermeneutics, allegoresis
Słowa kluczowe: post-sekularyzm, społeczeństwo postreligijne, społeczeństwo, społeczeństwo obywatelskie, demitologizacja, Bultmann, Habermas, hermeneutyka, alegoreza

The Tradition of Demythologization

In this article, I refer to the broad concept of demythologization. I understand it here as a hermeneutic process, referring mainly to religious-mythical utterances, in which the cultural layer in its historical or cosmological dimension is separated from the moral, theological, or philosophical content of these texts. These contents are then translated into a form that is comprehensible to people who are not the direct addressees of the religious message in question. Demythologization aims to preserve and communicate the profound content of an utterance by detaching it from its original form and placing it in a form communicable to people living in a different cultural context. The process of demythologization is traditionally associated with Rudolf Bultmann's theological program.[1] This does not mean, however, that demythologization itself, as a process of translating specific religious content into the language of another culture, was not present earlier in the philosophical and theological tradition.

The ancient Greek allegoresis,[2] as developed by Metrodorus of Lampsakos in the sixth century B.C.E.,[3] or later by Plutarch of Chaeronea[4] and Heraclitus Allegoretes,[5] seeks to uncover universal moral, spiritual, or philosophical content in the epics of Homer and Hesiod. It extracts a profound truth from the myth and then translates it into the language of the audience and their way of thinking. In this sense, the Greek allegorists claim that, behind the names and actions of the deities are the forces of nature, and that the individual gods symbolize them, so that Kronos personifies time, Hera air, and Hephaestus fire.

Similarly, Jewish allegorists associated with the Alexandrian milieu, such as Aristobulus, Aristeas, and Philo of Alexandria, extract moral and spiritual meaning from the Torah to then translate it into the philosophical categories of Hellenistic culture. In doing so, they claim to go beyond the corporeal form of the scriptures and reach their spirit, which contains universal truths.[6] In this sense, Philo of Alexandria, for example, reads the biblical concept of wisdom-*ḥokmah* as a cosmic reason-*Logos* conferring divine rationality on creation (*De opificio mundi* 16–24).

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[1]   R. Bultmann, *New Testament and Mythology and Other Basic Writings*, trans. S.M. Ogden, Minneapolis 1984, pp. 3–4; H. Jonas, *Zum Problem der Entmythologisierung*, [in:] *Il problema della demitizzazione*, E. Castelli (ed.), Padova 1961, pp. 19–25.

[2]   J. Zieliński, *Jerozolima, Ateny, Aleksandria. Greckie źródła pierwszych nurtów filozofii chrześcijańskiej*, Wrocław 2000, pp. 94–146; A. Świderkówna, *Bogowie zeszli z Olimpu. Bóstwo i mit w greckiej literaturze świata hellenistycznego*, Warszawa 1991, pp. 5–11, 113–161, 360–375.

[3]   L. Diogenes, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, II, 11, R.D. Hicks (ed.), Cambridge 1972, pp. 22–24, http://data.perseus.org/texts/urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0004.tlg001 [access: 23.08.2023].

[4]   Plutarch, *Isis and Osiris*, [in:] *Moralia*, vol. 5, trans. F.C. Babbitt, Cambridge 1936, 363-365F.

[5]   M. Domaradzki, *Heraklit Alegoreta i filozoficzne znaczenie starożytnej egzegezy Homera*, „Ruch Filozoficzny" 2011, vol. 68, no. 3, pp. 463–483; D.A. Russell, *The Rhetoric of the Homeric Problems*, [in:] *Metaphor, Allegory, and the Classical Tradition: Ancient Thought and Modern*, G.R. Boys-Stones (ed.), Oxford 2003, pp. 217–234.

[6]   W. Szczerba, *Z Jerozolimy do Aten – hellenizacja wczesnego chrześcijaństwa*, "Baptystyczny Przegląd Teologiczny" 2004, vol. 2, pp. 82–86.

This tradition is continued by some of the Church Fathers. Justin Martyr maintains that, together with God's covenant with the biblical Abraham, the Creator made a covenant with the Greeks. After all, God "does not show partiality" (Acts 10, 34).[7] Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Gregory of Nyssa, developing this thought and the hermeneutics of the earlier philosophers, indicate that the mythical form of the biblical stories provides a veil for the simple Christian, but is a clue for the mature man who wishes to come to a full knowledge of the truth. In this sense, Origen reads the biblical predictions of eschatological judgment as an instrument of divine pedagogy aimed at the salvation of all rational creatures: *apokatastasis ton panton* (*Peri archon* I, 6, 3).[8]

In modern times, Baruch Spinoza, among others, points out in his *Theologico-Political Treatise* that the teaching of Scripture, which is incompatible with the laws of nature, should be regarded as unreliable, and a metaphorical representation of universal moral truths should be sought in it.[9] In doing so, Scripture should be interpreted in its Semitic context so as not to make interpretative errors – for example, to read literally what the author intended to be translated allegorically.[10]

In a similar vein, at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Friedrich Schleiermacher points out that ancient religious doctrines should be radically revised under changing historical and cultural conditions so that they are comprehensible to human beings of different times and epochs.[11] He points out that the concepts of God as a personal being, Christ in terms of the hypostatic union, original sin, and human depravity are difficult to understand in a literal way in the modern era. These concepts need to be reworked so that they reflect man's "primordial religious experience" in a dynamic metaphorical language better than the ancient approaches.[12]

Rudolf Bultmann is regarded as the founder of the modern program of demythologization.[13] On the one hand, he continues the critical theology of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as initiated by Reimarus and Lessing.[14] On the other hand, Bultmann's hermeneutical method represents a kind of reaction to the liberal theology of the turn of the twentieth century and an attempt to defend the essential message-*kerygma* of Christianity. Bultmann agrees with the thesis that the biblical content is clothed in the mythical forms of the ancient world, which are difficult for

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[7] J. Martyr, *Apologies*, II.8.1–3, trans. D. Minns, P. Parvis, Oxford 2009, p. 13.

[8] W. Szczerba, *Koncepcja wiecznego powrotu*, Toruń 2014, pp. 237–244.

[9] B. de Spinoza, *A Theologico-Political Treatise*, J. Israel (ed.), trans. M. Silverthorne, J. Israel, Cambridge 2007.

[10] *Ibidem*, pp. 95–105.

[11] F. Schleiermacher, *Mowy o religii*, trans. J. Prokopiuk, Kraków 1995, pp. 108, 186, 199.

[12] W. Szczerba, *The Concept of Universal Salvation* – apokatastasis *in the Thought of Friedrich Schleiermacher*, "Forum Philosophicum" 2021, vol. 1, no. 26, pp. 104–111; M. Potępa, *Wprowadzenie do teologii młodego Schleiermachera*, [in:] F. Schleiermacher, *Mowy o religii…, op. cit.*, pp. 20–34.

[13] T. Kupś, *Posłowie*, [in:] K. Jaspers, R. Bultmann, *Problem demitologizacji*, trans. D. Kolasa, T. Kupś, M. Pawlicki, Toruń 2015, pp. 156–191; R. Bultmann, *Zum Problem der Entmythologisierung*, "Glauben und Verstehen" 1965, vol. 3, pp. 128–137; D.W. Congdon, *Demystifying the Program of Demythologizing: Rudolf Bultmann's Theological Hermeneutics*, "Harvard Theological Review" 2017, vol. 110, no. 1, pp. 1–23.

[14] G. Theissen, A. Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide*, Minneapolis 1998, pp. 1–5.

a twentieth-century person to accept. From an academic perspective, it is difficult to consider biblical miracles as historical events, as well as supernatural divine interventions. At most, it is possible to consider the belief in divine action as a historical phenomenon, but not the divine action itself.[15] Yet alongside the theoretical side of myth, where it attempts to explain the world like primitive scientific thought, Bultmann points to the practical aspect of myth, according to which it conveys existential truth.[16] Myth, thus practically understood, places the human being in a new existential space, in the truth of myth, which expresses the universal experience of humanity.[17]

Thus, myth in its theoretical, descriptive function must be rejected as an expression of a magical understanding of reality. Its literal acceptance and belief in physical heaven and hell, evil spirits and possession, miracles, and divine interventions, would be absurd today.[18] However, this cognitive dissonance does not necessarily exist concerning the practical dimension of myth, in which it relates to understanding and apprehending human existence.[19] After all, both in the past and today, man is faced with similar existential questions. His fate is determined by powers superior to him to whom he is subordinated in his existence. The universal experience of human existence is framed in the form of myth and mythical references to supernatural entities and powers and eschatological hope. The form of myth itself may be anachronistic and difficult for modern man to accept. However, myth expresses man's self-knowledge of his existence and is an expression of maturity in understanding existence as the mystery of life.

In this context, Rudolf Bultmann develops his program of demythologization, according to which he wishes to bring out the true intentions of biblical myth, i.e., to capture the truth about human existence contained in it and to present it in a form that is comprehensible to modern man.[20] Bultmann is convinced that biblical myth contains a universal truth about human existence. Secondly, he believes that with the appropriate hermeneutical tools, insights into these universal truths can be obtained. Thirdly, he takes the view that this truth can be clothed in a new form of communication so that the message-*kerygma* of the myth speaks to contemporary man in the same way that it spoke to the reader or listener in antiquity. However, the fundamental function of *kerygma* does not only refer to the description of existence but rather to existence itself with a corresponding awareness of the situation.[21] Knowing about

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[15] R. Bultmann, *Zum Problem…*, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

[16] *Idem*, *Jesus Christus und die Mythologie: Das Neue Testament im Licht der Bibelkritik*, Hamburg 1964, p. 17.

[17] E. Jüngel, *Die Warheit des Mythos und die Notwendigkeit der Enmythologisierung*, "Hölderlin-Jahrbuch" 1990–1991, vol. 27, pp. 49–50.

[18] R. Bultmann, *Zum Problem…*, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

[19] *Idem*, *Theologie als Kritik. Ausgewählte Rezensionen und Forschungsberichte.* M. Dreher, K.W. Müller (eds.), Tübingen 2002, p. 396; D.W. Congdon, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

[20] R. Bultmann, *Zum Problem…*, *op. cit.*, p. 13; D.W. Congdon, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

[21] The hermeneutical perspective and theological assumptions of Rudolph Bultmann have been criticized by several philosophers and theologians. Without going into details that exceed the scope of this article, I should mention at least the criticism of Bultmann's hermeneutics and theology that Karl Jasper develops, e.g., in *Myth and Christianity.* In this common publication of Jaspers and Bultmann, Jaspers, i.a., undermines Bultmann's separation of science and myth, criticizes Bultmann's hermeneutics, and sees Bultmann's theology – regardless of his pursuits to contextualize Biblical message – as "alien to both

friendship fundamentally differs from living in a friendship with another person. Likewise, the message-*kerygma* of myth goes beyond a mere description of reality and leads to the experience of an existential reality that changes a person's life, just as friendship changes the lives of those who experience it.[22]

Jürgen Habermas – Religion in a Post-religious World

Among several contemporary thinkers continuing the tradition of demythologiza-tion, Jürgen Habermas is of relevance to this article. Although the philosopher de-scribes himself as a methodological atheist and a "religiously unmusical" person, religion nevertheless occupies a significant part of his analyses. Particularly in his later works, from the beginning of the twenty-first century, Habermas appreciates the role of religion in liberal societies and points out that it would be fundamentally illiberal to exclude the religious perspective from public discourse.[23]

Contemporary liberal societies, especially in the West, are based – as Habermas points out – on the modern concept of democracy, individual freedom, and religious pluralism. In their democratic pluralism, these societies promote tolerance towards different world views, values, and attitudes. A natural consequence of such social de-velopment is their widespread process of secularization, which is expressed, among other things, in the formal separation of state and church and the worldview neutral-ity and denominational independence of subsystems of social life such as science, culture, law, and education. The secularization of social consciousness manifests it-self in phenomena such as a greater indifference to religion on the part of citizens, a decline in the importance of ecclesiastical authorities, and a selective attitude to religious dogma[24]. This process also takes place within religions themselves and their institutional representations, forcing them, among other things, to be tolerant of other faiths and to abandon their claim to be the ultimate authority on worldviews and moral issues.[25]

A liberal state, based on the concept of human freedom and pluralism of world-views, in which everyone *ex definitione* makes the law and then obeys it, aims to

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science and philosophy". K. Jaspers, R. Bultmann, *Myth and Christianity: An Inquiry into the Possibi-lity of Religion without Myth*, trans. N. Gutermann, New York 1958, pp. 4–7, 15, 39–40, 49–55, 76–77; L. Kołakowski, *Iluzje demitologizacji*, [in:] *idem*, *Cywilizacja na ławie oskarżonych*, Warszawa 1990, pp. 215–236; J.M. Cho, *Karl Jaspers' critique of Rudolf Bultmann and his turn toward Asia*, "Existenz" 2010, vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 11–15.

[22] R. Bultmann, *Jesus Christus und die Mythologie…*, *op. cit.*, p. 84; *idem*, *Die Geschitlichkeit des Daseins in der Glaube. Antwort and Gerhardt Kuhlmann*, [in:] *Neues Testament und christiliche Existenz. Theologische Aufsätze*, A. Lindemann (ed.), Tübingen 2002, p. 70; D.W. Congdon, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

[23] J. Habermas, *Notes on Post-Secular Society*, "New Perspectives Quarterly" 2008, vol. 25, no. 4, pp. 17–29.

[24] I. Borowik, *Socjologia Religii Petera L. Bergera*, [in:] P. Berger, *Święty Baldachim. Elementy socjologicznej teorii religii*, trans. W. Kurdziel, Kraków 2005, p. 9.

[25] P. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*, New York 2011, pp. 87–141.

develop mature citizens with the democratic values necessary for its survival and further development. The result of such a social pedagogy is intended to be a civic state in which everyone is actively involved, supports the involvement of fellow citizens, and respects the pluralistic worldview of others. But how is this goal to be achieved from the perspective of the state as a whole?[26] Is it not the case that democratic societies, on the one hand, want worldview tolerance, but on the other hand, lose the overriding principle of social integration and paradoxically increase the likelihood of conflict?

In this context, Habermas refers to Ernst Böckenförde's famous question "[…] does not a state based on the principles of freedom and religious pluralism accidentally make use of normative assumptions that it is not able to produce on its own?"[27]

In his essay, Böckenförde points out that for a liberal society to function civically, it needs some kind of unifying bond, a sustaining force that can, as it were, organically support the integral development of society. In his view, religion can fulfil just such a function.[28]

Jürgen Habermas follows Böckenförde's perspective and upholds his question about the possibility of liberal societies developing into a civic community.[29] In pre-modern Europe, religion acted as the overarching integrating principle of society, setting the norms of truth, goodness, and law, according to which states were organized. Religion was a kind of "comprehensive theory" that explained the totality of reality and unified the lives of citizens.[30] However, it lost this role in modern Europe, which abandoned the dominant function of religion and underwent a far-reaching pluralization of worldviews in the democratic process. One of the effects of this process is secularization in the broadest sense. A natural consequence of cultural pluralism within a society – Habermas notes – is that there is less common ground for solidarity-based solutions to the problems and challenges it faces.[31]

And yet, in the philosopher's view, there is no descent from the "path of capitalist modernization." Secularization and worldview pluralism affect and will affect all societies and within them many sectors of life.[32] The danger that Habermas – following Böckenförde – perceives such a development of societies is associated with a shift away from communal ideals, such as interpersonal solidarity, mutual respect and concern for others, to the "logic of the free market", in which social solidarity is destroyed by market forces promoting consumerism and the egocentrism of private business. The result of this situation is the slow disintegration of liberal societies, with the "free market" taking over areas traditionally regulated by the state. As

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[26] J. Habermas, J. Ratzinger, *Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion*, trans. B. McNeil, San Francisco 2006, pp. 24–28.

[27] J. Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion. Philosophical Essays*, trans. C. Cronin, Cambridge 2014, p. 104; E.W. Böckenförde, *Die Entstehung des Staates als Vorgang der Säkularisation*, [in:] *Recht, Staat, Freiheit*, Frankfurt 1991, p. 112.

[28] E.W. Böckenförde, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

[29] J. Habermas, *Between Naturalism…*, *op. cit.*, p. 101–108.

[30] *Idem*, *Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1, trans. T. McCarthy, Boston 1984, pp. 44–57.

[31] J. Habermas, J. Ratzinger, *Dialectics of Secularization…*, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

[32] J. Habermas, *Between Naturalism…*, *op. cit.*, pp. 309–311.

a result, the communal public sphere is beginning to shrink, democratic values are giving way to stronger market energies, and fellow citizens are beginning to see each other, in the context of cost-benefit relationships, as potential competitors rather than partners in achieving higher communal goals.[33]

Is it possible to reverse or at least stop this process? In his 2001 *Glauben und Wissen* speech, Habermas points to religion as an essential ally of the liberal, civic state against the "alienating forces of modernity."[34] He points out that religion is not merely an expression of an archaic past; in fact, it is not dying out even in the liberal societies of the West but is an integral part of Western culture both in the historical-cultural sense and in the still actual potential of meaning contained in religious language. Habermas develops this theme in his later publications, including *Religion and Rationality*[35] and *Dialectics of Secularization*,[36] written together with Joseph Ratzinger. In these works, he points to the centuries-long joint influence of philosophy and theology of predominantly Christian provenance. This has resulted, among other things, in the widespread Hellenization of Christianity and, on the other hand, in the influence of the Christian religion on the creation and consolidation of such democratic social concepts as personal rights or individual freedom.[37]

At the same time, Habermas is convinced that in modern liberal societies, people learn civic values primarily outside the so-called public sphere, in places and circles that require engagement with others, responsibility, and solidarity. These can be interest clubs, support groups, workplaces, and nursing homes. Mainly, however, it is the family home and religious communities. It is here that citizens learn to balance their well-being with the well-being of others.[38]

Considering the integrative and pedagogical role of religion and the "ever-present potential for meaning contained in religious language", Habermas argues that, just as religion served with its concepts and guidelines to shape modern democratic societies in the past, it can still play an important role in shaping the civic attitudes of post-secular societies.[39] He points out that religions can also play a significant role in a contemporary, secular context, if only because religious intuitions have been

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[33] *Ibidem*, p. 102.

[34] J. Habermas, *Glauben und Wissen: Rede zum Friedenspreis des Deutschen Buchhandels*, Berlin 2001.

[35] *Idem*, *Religion and Rationality: Essays on Reason, God, and Modernity*, E. Mendieta (ed.), Cambridge 2002, pp. 1–37, 147–168.

[36] J. Habermas, J. Ratzinger, *op. cit.*

[37] J. Habermas, *Between Naturalism*…, *op. cit.*, pp. 110–113.

[38] J. Habermas, J. Ratzinger, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

[39] I adopt – following Habermas – the following perspective on post-secular society: "On the one hand, faithful to agnostic assumptions, it abstains from judgment on the truths of religion and relies (without polemical intention) on the recognition of the existence of a strict boundary between faith and knowledge. On the other hand, it turns against a scientist limited conception of reason and the exclusion of religious doctrines from the genealogy of reason." (J. Habermas, *Między naturalizmem a religią. Rozprawy filozoficzne*, trans. M. Pańków, Warszawa 2012, p. 123) "In short, post-metaphysical thought adopts towards religion an attitude of readiness to learn and agnosticism at the same time." (J. Habermas, *Między naturalizmem a religią...*, *op. cit.*, p. 12). See also: J. Habermas, *Notes on Post-Secular Society*, *op. cit.*, pp. 17–29.

subjected to subtle interpretations over hundreds of years and hermeneutically they remain alive.[40] Habermas believes that this re-interpretation of the moral intuitions contained in religious truths is still possible and, given the danger of the disintegration of liberal societies, is desirable. Yes, religious language per se is not always acceptable in contemporary secular Western societies. Nevertheless, assuming (1) the priority of a secular language in liberal societies, (2) the fact that the language of religion is still the "bearer of possible truth content,"[41] (3) the fact that religious citizens want to express themselves in public, and (4) secular citizens are looking for "truth content," Habermas argues for a translation of the moral intuitions contained in religious language into a secular language that is acceptable to all citizens.[42]

In writing about translation, Habermas is not so much pointing to a direct translation of religious concepts, but rather – in line with the tradition of demythologization – to a transfer of the semantic potential, the "truth content" contained in the religious idiom into a secular form. This translation is intended to lead to a "lifting [*Aufhebung*] […] of semantic potential that would otherwise remain locked in the idiomatic forms of a particular religious community."[43]

The aim of translation is thus to derive moral intuition from the religious idiom in such a way that the originally religious content becomes acceptable to all. The new translation of the "semantic potential" should function in a secular context just as the earlier form of communication functioned in a religious context, but without "dependence on the transcendence of ritual or overtly religious […] language."[44]

Of course, Habermas is aware that there are limits to the process of demythologization.[45] Religious language can be hermetic and so tightly bound to a particular historical and cultural context that it can be difficult to understand, let alone translate, in the contemporary world. The German philosopher does not draw the boundaries of the translation he postulates, nor does he create a strict and unambiguous translation methodology. Rather, he points to the centuries-old interrelationships between philosophical and theological content, which resulted, among other things, in "the philosophication" of Christianity[46] on the one hand and the influence of Christian

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[40] J. Habermas J., *Between Naturalism…*, *op. cit.*, pp. 109–110.

[41] *Idem*, *Religion in the Public Sphere*, "European Journal of Philosophy" 2006, vol. 14, no. 1, p. 17.

[42] *Idem*, *Between Naturalism…*, *op. cit.*, pp. 6, 131–132, 142, 214; *idem*, *Religion in the Public…*, *op. cit.*, pp. 8–9; P. Gleason, *From Jürgen Habermas to George Lindbeck: On Translating Religious Concepts into Secular Terms*, "The Journal of Scriptural Reasoning" 2016, vol. 15, no. 1, https://jsr.shanti.virginia.edu/back-issues/volume-15-no-1-march-2016-public-scripture/from-jurgen-habermas-to--george-lindbeck-on-translating-religious-concepts-into-secular-terms/ [access: 7.12.2023]; J. Rawls, *The idea of public reason: postscript*, [in:] *Deliberative Democracy: Essays on Politics and Reason*, J. Bohman, W. Rehg (eds.), Cambridge 1997, pp. 131–141.

[43] J. Habermas, *Religion in the Public…*, *op. cit.* p. 115; M. Wodziński, *Czyste pojęcia intelektu oraz transcendentalna jedność apercepcji jako źródła dialektyki Hegla*, "Kultura i Wartości" 2018, vol. 26, p. 161.

[44] M. Pensky, *Solidarity with the Past and the Work of Translation*, [in:] *Habermas and Religion*, C. Calhoun, E. Mendieta, J. Van Antwerpen (eds.), Cambridge 2014, p. 320.

[45] J. Habermas, *Between Naturalism…*, *op. cit.*, pp. 108–109.

[46] W. Szczerba, *Z Jerozolimy do Aten – hellenizacja wczesnego chrześcijaństwa*, "Baptystyczny Przegląd Teologiczny" 2004, vol. 2, p. 77–89.

thought on the shape of modern secular philosophy on the other.[47] He emphasizes that theological traditions have undergone such reinterpretations over the centuries to remain alive in a changing cultural context. In this sense, the translation he advocates represents a continuation of centuries of hermeneutical processes concerning sacred texts and truths of faith. In such an understanding, the moral intuitions captured in sacred texts and truths of faith are often already present in the public sphere and constitute the common capital of humanity. In the process of translation, this intuition embodied in the truths of faith needs to be defined and put into a form that is acceptable in a secular context, so that its potential has its full impact on its secular audience.

As an example, Jürgen Habermas gives the theological concept of the image of God – *imago Dei*. He points out that at its core lies the universal truth of human dignity, which, according to the conviction of Immanuel Kant, should be translated into unconditioned respect towards every human being.[48] "The translation of the theological doctrine of creation in God's image into the idea of the equal and unconditional dignity of all human beings constitutes one such conserving translation. It makes the content of biblical concepts available to the general public of unbelievers and members of other faiths beyond the boundaries of a particular religious community."[49]

Habermas's conception of translation was met with several critical reactions, both philosophical and theological. His position has been accused of religious reductionism, which reduces the richness of religious thoughts and experiences to particularistic concepts subject to translation into secular language. As an atheist thinker, Habermas was criticized for failing to consider the multi-layered specificity of religious experience, which, for example in its mystical dimension, cannot always be translated into secular concepts. Habermas's belief in the secular as a superior communicative basis in contemporary liberal Western societies was also criticized.[50]

The above criticisms of Jürgen Habermas's concept of translation seem pertinent and help to better understand the limitations of the theory and the areas that should be better developed in the future. However, they do not mean that Habermas's concept itself loses its *raison d'être*. Translating religious truths into secular language is a difficult task, involving the risk of simplification and reductionism of multifaceted religious experiences, and a risky task, requiring a good understanding of different

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[47] P. Valadier, *Jacques Maritain's personalist conception of human dignity*, [in:] *The Cambridge Handbook of Human Dignity: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, M. Düwell, J. Braarvig, R. Brownsword, D. Mieth (eds.), Cambridge 2015, pp. 260–263.

[48] J. Habermas et al., *An Awareness of What is Missing: Faith and Reason in a Post-Secular Age*, trans. C. Cronin, Malden 2010, p. 63.

[49] J. Habermas, *Between Naturalism…*, *op. cit.*, p. 110; J. Habermas, J. Ratzinger, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

[50] S. Sikka, *On Translating Religious Reasons: Rawls, Habermas, and the Quest for a Neutral Public Sphere*, "The Review of Politics" 2016, vol. 78, no. 1, pp. 91–116; C. Diamond, *Losing Your Concepts*, "Ethics" 1988, vol. 98, no. 2, pp. 266; F.G. Lawrence, *Transcendence from Within: Benedict XVI and Jürgen Habermas on the Dialogue between Secular Reason and Religious Faith*, [in:] F.G. Lawrence, S. Rosenberg, K.M. Vander Schel, *The Fragility of Consciousness: Faith, Reason, and the Human Good*, Toronto 2017, pp. 193–228; M. Reder, J. Schmidt, *Habermas and Religion*, [in:] J. Habermas et al., *An Awareness of What is Missing…*, *op. cit.*, pp. 1–14; C. Tietz, *Habermas's Call for Translating Religion into Secular Language*, [in:] *Translating Religion: What is Lost and Gained?*, M. DeJonge, C. Tietz (eds.), New York 2015, pp. 104–122.

cultural contexts. Nevertheless, it is a process that has been taking place for thousands of years, both in ancient Greek philosophy, early Christian thought, and modern philosophy and theology. Habermas's idea of translation is part of a centuries-old tradition of demythologization, the origins of which on European soil can be traced as far back as the sixth century B.C.E. In modern theology, it has been made concrete by such thinkers as Baruch Spinoza, Friedrich Schleiermacher, and Rudolf Bultmann. Habermas continues their perspective from the secular angle and points to the importance of religion in developing contemporary, civic societies.

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