RITUALS AND ALGORITHMS: GENEALOGY OF REFLECTIVE FAITH AND POSTMETAPHYSICAL THINKING

Martin Beck Matuštík

Arizona State University

Abstract. What happens when mindless symbols of algorithmic AI encounter mindful performative rituals? I return to my criticisms of Habermas's secularising reading of Kierkegaard's ethics. Next, I lay out Habermas's claim that the sacred complex of ritual and myth contains the ur-origins of postmetaphysical thinking and reflective faith. If reflective faith shares with ritual same origins as does communicative interaction, how do we access these archaic ritual sources of human solidarity in the age of AI?

> [W]hat we, the moderns, might learn from the workings of ritual: namely, the making of social solidarity on the one hand, and a specific kind of reflexivity on the other.[1]

Ritual and Myth

In his culminating critical theory of religion, Habermas[2] launches a hypothesis that the sacred complex of ritual and myth contains the dual origins of reflective faith and postmetaphysical thinking. Secularization of rituals engenders myths. Ritual and myth represent a stubbornly irreducible asymmetry. The knot binding languages to presymbolic rituals is not untied by reducing the rationality differentials between sacred and profane domains. Because

---

1   Massimo Rosati, "The Archaic and Us: Ritual, Myth, the Sacred and Modernity", *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 40, no. 4–5 (2014): 364.

2   Jürgen Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion* (MIT Press, 2008); Jürgen Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking ll* (Polity Press, 2017); Jürgen Habermas, *Auch eine Geschichte der Philosophie. Vol. 1. Die okzidentale Konstellation von Glauben und Wissen. Vol. 2. Vernünftige Freiheit. Spuren des Diskurses über Glauben und Wissen.* (Suhrkamp Verlag, 2019).

cognitive evolution does not yield a full reduction of rituals to symbols,[3] some of our shared human ritual prehistory survives all linguistification into the present. Ritual origins punctuate the first emergence of *Homo Sapiens* some 200,000 years B.P.[4]

In human prehistory, ritual interaction foregrounds linguistic interaction. This phylogenetic origin is retained in ontogenesis of the species. As translated into myths, archaic rituals evolve with communicative competencies. Because they retain a link to prelinguistic ritual performances, contemporary liturgies of great religions hold keys to the sacred complex. Established sacred performances never stopped translating ritual solidarities into symbolic structures. Human civilizations emerge from the translation of rituals to myth as our species undergoes the first Cognitive Revolution at 70,000 B.P. Imaginative and communicative competencies have been *Sapiens'* hallmark on Earth.

Rituals and Algorithms

The dialectic of rituals and algorithms opens a new chapter of the Anthropocene and the Axial Age at the threshold of the Second Cognitive Revolution. Our new hallmark on Earth is becoming dataism, on the side of postmetaphysical thinking, [*Habermas critiques it!*] and mindful ritual awareness on the side of reflective faith. How do we access archaic presymbolic ritual origins of human solidarity with that mindfulness which is requisite for our survival as recognisably human in the postsecular age of cybernetic singularity between artificial intelligence (AI) and life? What happens when mindless symbols of algorithmic AI encounter mindful performative rituals?

I return to my criticisms of Habermas's secularising reading of Kierkegaard's ethics (1). Next, I lay out Habermas's claim that the sacred complex of ritual and myth contains the ur-origins of postmetaphysical thinking and

---

3   Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking ll*, xi.
4   Yovel N. Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (HarperCollins, 2015), chart, "Timeline of History". On rituals and their transformed place in modernity, see Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (Free Press, 1995); Roy Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999); Massimo Rosati, *Ritual and the Sacred: A Neo-Durkheimian Analysis of Politics, Religion and the Self* (Ashgate, 2009); Massimo Rosati, "Kinds of Ritual and the Place of Transcendence", *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 36, no. 1 (2010); Rosati, "The Archaic and Us"; Adam. B. Seligman, *Modernity's Wager* (Princeton Univ. Press, 2000); Adam. B. Seligman, "A reply to my critics", *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 36, no. 1 (2010).

reflective faith (2). If reflective faith shares with ritual same origins as does communicative interaction, how do we access these archaic ritual sources of human solidarity in the age of artificial intelligence (3)?

I. HABERMAS'S SECULARISING TRANSLATION OF KIERKEGAARD REVISITED

Habermas[5] has been developing an innovative reading of Kierkegaard's post-conventional ethics.[6] I have been preoccupied with Habermas's 1987 Copenhagen question addressed to Kierkegaard: How are we to integrate socially that improbable existential individual whose postconventionally reflective faith has survived disenchanted Christendom? I revisit his question in order to tease out why in his most recent work he thinks that we need to recover ritual performatives through the cultic liturgical remnants of the First Axial religions. A rebirth of mindful values may be required for a more lasting access to the human ritual origins if we are to correct for the domination of "the data religion".[7] I ask why Habermas doesn't allow for a viable Second Axial Age or "Anthropocenic future".[8]

Habermas values Kierkegaard not only as a reflective religious thinker but also as a Socratic gadfly and postmetaphysical thinker. After Kierkegaard, Habermas holds, we either must translate all religious claims to one of the validity spheres of secular culture or we must demythologize them.

---

5   Jürgen Habermas, *The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historians' Debate* (MIT Press, 1989); Jürgen Habermas, *Justification and Application: Remarks on Discourse Ethics* (MIT Press, 1993).

6   See on "affinity with the existentialist, i.e. the Marcusean, variant of Critical Theory" (Jürgen Habermas, *Autonomy and Solidarity: Interviews with Jürgen Habermas*, ed. Peter Dews (London: Verso, 1986), 150 and 190); on interest in Kierkegaard in general (Habermas, *The New Conservatism*); on the communicative rendition of Kierkegaard's ethical stage under the category of "ethical-existential discourse" and postconventional ethics (Jürgen Habermas, "Justice and Solidarity", in *The Moral Domain: Essays in the Ongoing Discussion Between Philosophy and the Social Sciences*, ed. Gertrud Nunner-Winkler, Thomas E. Wren and Wolfgang Edelstein (MIT Press, 1990); Jürgen Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* (MIT Press, 1990); Habermas, *Justification and Application*.)

7   Yovel N. Harari, *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow* (HarperCollins, 2016), chap. 11.

8   Bryan S. Turner, "Ritual, Belief and Habituation: Religion and Religions from the Axial Age to the Anthropocene", *European Journal of Social Theory* 20, no. 1 (2017): 142.

As an observer of the existential appropriation of ethical and religious stages of existence, Habermas affirms that we can no longer turn Kierkegaardian clocks back to precritical or forward to fundamentalist religiosity. Following Kant's demotion of proofs for G-d's existence and adopting weaker moral postulates, Kierkegaard does not bother with classical moves to shore up religious beliefs. Theological dogmatics, philosophical apologetics, religious and political theodicy alike, and fundamentalist revivals all but destroy reflective faith. Kierkegaard's religious life catapults him out of safe liturgical spaces of the Lutheran Church. The earnest singular individual becomes a subjective and subjunctive thinker of possibilities that are G-d. One stands alone trying to become faithful in modernity.[9]

I.1 Copenhagen Question to Kierkegaard Answered in Ethical-Existential Discourses

Habermas shares two positions with Kierkegaard. One, the posttraditional individual is a fruit of western modernity marked by postmetaphysical thinking. Kierkegaard does not conflate faith claims with beliefs. Faith is not framed by the differentiated value spheres of modernity — science, morality and law, and culture. Two, individualization transpires through socialization: I become a self in an ongoing paradoxical choice of who I am and want to be. The existential individual is not an acosmic, asocial category, rather posttraditional, postconventional, and postmetaphysical singularity is a pivot of potential social dissent. Kierkegaard's ethical-religious reflexivity allows for Habermas's robust criticism of religious as well as secular fundamentalism.[10]

Leaving Kierkegaard's religious activism aside, Habermas focuses on the ethical stage of existence. He translates Kierkegaard's imputed religious beliefs into criticizable validity claims.

With his unrevised linguistification thesis, Habermas models human social evolution on the linear trajectory from one kind of sacred towards one

---

9   Note how Sartre is becoming atheist in seculardom or de Beauvoir a woman among womankind.

10   After his early confrontation with Heidegger, the Historians' Debate marks Habermas's (Habermas, *The New Conservatism*) turns to existential categories. Here he unmasks nationalist identity-formation behind historical revisionism. In his latest work (Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking ll*; Habermas, *Auch eine Geschichte der Philosophie. Vol. 1. Die okzidentale Konstellation von Glauben und Wissen; Vol. 2. Vernünftige Freiheit. Spuren des Diskurses über Glauben und Wissen.*), he confronts "Enlightenment fundamentalism".

kind of profane. Linguistification here yields total rationalization of the sacred, i.e., reduction of the sacred contents into profane vernaculars.[11] Following this version of the thesis, translations should achieve a thorough reduction of gaps between the sacred and profane forms of understanding. In existential terms, Aristotelian virtues are transformed by post-Kantian emphasis on deontic freedom. As with Kant's monological categorical imperative, when Habermas adopts a Kierkegaardian framework, he integrates individual singularity into ethical-existential discourse. The individualizing self's earnest questioning must be grasped at the same time as one's socialization. First Kierkegaard, then also Habermas reinterprets Aristotle's questions of the good life through Hegelian lenses of ethical life with emphasis on open society. And both thinkers invert Hegel's privileging of *Sittlichkeit* (ethos of peoples) by prioritizing Kant's *Moralität* (the moral point of view). Habermas merely anchors Kierkegaard's deontic inversion in communicative discourse.

Kierkegaard teleologically suspends communitarian ethics (what the priests know best theologically may not be best for reflective faith) in favour of the concretely existing individual. Kierkegaard's singular individual is self-questioning. If individualization is always already also socialization (pace Habermas's adoption of Mead), then self-choice implies teleological suspension of received traditions, conventions, and social institutions. Habermas merely anchors Kierkegaard's ethical-existential questioning in normative moral performatives.

I.2 Ambiguity of Translating the Religious Kierkegaard as a Religious Critic of Religious Institutions

When Habermas searches for a posttraditional social world that would stabilise a risky identity-formation of postmetaphysically unsettled modern individuals, he generates ambiguity about the scope of translation. This very ambiguity resurfaces in Habermas's thinking about sources of the postsecular access-points to archaic ritual life.

The Kierkegaardian self is not a given, e.g., one is not a Christian just because one is born in Christendom. Becoming human is an existential task of self-becoming. Becoming a self is that modal category of reflective dissent whereby one's individualisation via socialisation and one's competence

---

11 Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communivative Action* (Heinemann, 1987).

to raise and evaluate validity claims enable a critical relation to history and lived lifeworld. Kierkegaard teleologically suspends any immediate access to the archaic sacred complex available through Christendom, i.e., the First Axial values. The great masters of suspicion, Nietzsche, Marx, Freud, Douglass, Dostoyevsky, and Kierkegaard variously proclaim the death of the first Axial G-d(s). So how do we access rituals after the death of G-d?

In his unrevised rationalisation thesis, Habermas depicted all "religiosity" under the rubrics of metaphysics and sacred culture. As forms of understanding, all religions would be therefore ideologies. Religiosity as ideology is that form of understanding which "systematically limits possibility of communication owing to its failure to differentiate sufficiently among the various validity claims".[12] Habermas reviewed the sequence of the forms of understanding according to the rationality differential between the sacred and profane domains. In figure 28, he curiously left the bottom two areas blank. As if postmetaphysical thinking, before he revised his take on religion, purportedly could or should reduce all rationality differentials, reaching a transparent form of understanding capable of evaluating all contents of culture strictly under criticisable validity claims.

Even in this unrevised thesis of linguistification, Habermas retains a phantom limb of a post-formal form of understanding. Those limbs are the blank areas in figure 28 where one could implant a postmetaphysical access to archaic rituals. But must this access come only via institutionally received First Axial values? Kierkegaard's performance of existential singularity is one candidate for extra-institutionalized ritual implants.[13] Why not learn from the world-variety of new ritual performances and the "Anthropocenic future"[14] as

---

12   Habermas, *The Theory of Communivative Action*, 189–191 and figure 28.

13   We could do the same with Nietzsche's transvaluation of all values or Ken Wilber, "An integral Theory of Consciousness", *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 4, no. 1 (1997); Ken Wilber, "On the Nature of a Postmetaphysical Spirituality: Response to Habermas and Weis", accessed August 6, http://wilber.shambhala.com/html/misc/habermas/index.cfm/; Ken Wilber, *Integral Spirituality: A Startling New Role for Religion in the Modern and Postmodern World* (Shambhala, 2006); Martin B. Matuštík, "Stages, States, and Modes of Existence in Integral Critical Theory", in *Dancing with Sophia*: *Integral Philosophy on the Verge*, ed. Michael Schwartz and Sean Esbjörn-Hargens (State Univ. of New York Press, 2019) integral spirituality.

14   Turner, "Ritual, Belief and Habituation: Religion and Religions from the Axial Age to the Anthropocene", 142.

so many orphaned rituals bereft of the First Axial religions? New rituals are begotten to solve new challenges of the Second Cognitive Revolution.

> Habermas's view seems to be 'disenchanted' and even 'nostalgic': the echo of the archaic is still here, and religious people are those who have a privileged access to it, while 'we' — as modern unbelievers — can just take note of this. … [W]hen it comes to religions and the sacred, we have to be ready to think about those myths that think us, in order to play our part, as citizens and human beings, in making those new and more humane myths that are needed to replace the old ones.[15]

Habermas accepts now the sharp distinction between beliefs and faith. He detects but does not take seriously emerging unchurched spiritualities and new faith communities, perhaps because their rituals are institutionally homeless. In the process of rationalisation, myths, beliefs, and theologies are distilled into one of the value spheres of modernity. If religious beliefs do not form a distinct value sphere of modernity, how is reflective faith transmitted in lived rituals? Worldviews and values constitute "the *proprium* of religion" only in the participant's perspective as a faith-witness — not in the observer's perspective on religious beliefs.[16]

So why does not Habermas enlist Kierkegaard's religiosity among the postsecular ways whereby one can access an archaic ritual core of humanity? He intentionally considers only the received liturgical-ritual resources of mainstream Axial religions, hoping they are not yet exhausted to provide the faithful with a participatory access to the sacred complex.

> The sacred complex has not disintegrated and religious traditions have preserved their vitality in their symbiosis with the liturgical practices of worldwide religious communities. Their members can even lay claim to a privilege. Religious communities, in performing their rituals, have preserved the access to an archaic experience — and to a source of solidarity — from which the unbelieving sons and daughters of modernity are excluded.[17]

---

15   Rosati, "The Archaic and Us", 364, 366.

16   Habermas, *Auch eine Geschichte der Philosophie. Vol. 1. Die okzidentale Konstellation von Glauben und Wissen. Vol. 2. Vernünftige Freiheit. Spuren des Diskurses über Glauben und Wissen* cited in Eduardo Mendieta, "The Axial Age, Social Evolution, and Postsecular Consciousness", *Critical Research on Religion* 6, no. 3 (2018): 301. See my entry on Kierkegaard in Martin B. Matuštík, "Kierkegaard", in *The Habermas Lexicon*, ed. Amy Allen and Eduardo Mendieta (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2019).

17   Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking ll*, 56.

As if phantoms implants of new Axial forms of understanding had no mouths and ears capable of delivering and receiving articulable communicative modalities. Habermas vouches for tolerance of resurgent religious discourses in modernity (depicted in the frame of the postsecular condition). He warns of the spectre of "Enlightenment fundamentalism".[18] He accuses rationalisation laying one-sided burdens on those who nonetheless wish to articulate intuitions that survived secularisation. Habermas concedes that secularisation is not identical with secularism; scientism should not define all conditions of validity.

But what must have been true of the archaic appearance of rituals (i.e., that they allowed for coordination of intersubjectively shared worlds before their linguistification) may very well be true for their resurgence in the age dominated by AI. I venture a hypothesis that existential singularity (a new modal access to the archaic sacred human complex) contravenes the arrival of techno-bio singularity (a possibly total obliteration of human capacity for ritual awareness by smart but mindless algorithms). Rituals, G-d, mind, or meditation cannot be algorithmized. But could we lose our competence to reinvent ourselves by performing them? This is a core "climactic" question faced by *Homo Sapiens.*

I think, Habermas would update his Copenhagen question as follows: Kierkegaard's critique of the established Protestant Christianity closed access to rituals of his established religious community. How is such a non-institutional "practice in Christianity" to survive when it leaves singular existence without public liturgies empowering human solidarity? Kierkegaard once wanted to be a minister, but he rejected all sacraments, even marriage, and on his death bed he refused communion and burial by the church. How can one communicate this exceptional religious experience without participating in the living faith of a religious community? How can one be understood by the secular age that, like self-mocking Habermas, became spiritually tone-deaf?[19]

This is how his Copenhagen question makes full sense once we absorb the force of Habermas's revisions in philosophy of religion: When Kierkegaard's teleological suspension of the ethical — the ethos of the peoples and nations — is secularized, its appeal is no longer the sacred. The existential individual,

---

18   Ibid., xiv; chap. 10: IV.
19   As recent as after the Twin Towers attack in 2001, Habermas calls himself religiously tone-deaf (Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking ll*, 76; also Jürgen Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature* (Polity Press, 2003).

when linguistified, becomes the regulative ideal of a communication community. Just as Kierkegaard's reflective and postmetaphysical move to existential singularity, so also Habermas's communicative ideality teleologically suspends religious and cultural nationalism (Christendom), received traditions, religious and secular fundamentalist beliefs. Habermas worries about recovering some minimal communicative normativity in a social setting. Relativization of conventions leaves dissenting individuals in a postsecular condition that renders them motivationally weak and cognitively uncertain. Kierkegaard's individual, just as law, is suspended between facts and norms.

And from the vantage point of a genealogy of reflective faith and postmetaphysical thinking, the Copenhagen question can be rephrased as follows: We know now that the sacred complex of ritual and myth saves the archaic source of the First Axial *Sapiential* solidarities. What must the social and political institutions and communal solidarities be like that could stabilise now the improbable existential dissenters in the postsecular condition of AI.? This is how I have attempted to broaden Habermas's continuing preoccupations in the Anthropocene.[20]

II. THE SACRED COMPLEX: UR-ORIGINS OF REFLECTIVE FAITH AND POSTMETAPHYSICAL THINKING

The revised thesis of linguistification affirms the human ur-origins in ritual and myth.

> The unmistakably archaic character of ritual practices and their need for translation raise the question of whether rites and myths developed simultaneously with the emergence of Homo [S]apiens endowed with the ability to speak, or whether ritual behaviour is an even earlier phenomenon than the evolutionary threshold represented by the development of a grammatical language.[21]

---

20 Derrida recognized in Kierkegaard's Abrahamic fear and trembling no longer some political or irrational exception attributed to the Dane's presumed decisionism and irrationalism. Fear and trembling are daily occurrences in which the wholly other is every other sacrificed in the application of universal norms (cf. Martin B. Matuštík, "Derrida and Habermas on the Aporia of the Politics of Identity and Difference: Towards Radical Democratic Multiculturalism", *Constellations: An International Journal of Critical and Democratic Theory* 1, no. 3 (1995)).

21 Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking ll*, no. 45.

Habermas seeks access to what once gave rise to the archaic rituals when *Sapiens* generated human coordination and stabilized solidarity. Are there ritual spaces accessible to us today, what are they or where should we seek them? Must they be sought phylogenetically as remainders of the archaic rituals under the postsecular conditions? Or is that very search necessarily a great spiritual accelerator of the Second Axial Age?

II.1 Rituals in the Genealogy of Reflective Faith and Postmetaphysical Thinking

We need to deepen Habermas's revision and decouple the sacred complex from rationalization altogether: "naive theories of secularization can be criticized not only by taking into account the place of the religious sacred and religious communities in a post-secular horizon, but also from the point of view of a host of secular forms of the sacred"[22] distinguishes "liturgical" from "cognitive" and "postmodern reflectivity." Rosati differentiates "two classes of rituals": the "mystical postmodern rituals" are "ritual-like performances"; and "liturgical rituals" are conserved over time in mainstream received "ritualistic religious traditions."[23] Habermas[24] identifies only the latter class of rituals pertaining to the great monotheistic traditions as "the proprium of religion" as such that has not yet been exhausted by the rationalization of sacred myths and worldviews. Emerging spiritualities of the Second Axial Age are nowhere on Habermas's ritual bucket list. When we move beyond the Christian Protestant proprium that seems to frame Habermas's window into all things religious, then with interfaith pluralism and transvaluation of received monotheistic values, "ritualized practices and memories are almost everything, while theology and beliefs are frequently an almost residual dimension".[25]

With Habermas's revision of the secularising linguistification of the lifeworld, my particular return to Kierkegaard's existential mode of communication gains a new urgency. I pointed out that a secularizing linguistification of a Kierkegaardian inward mode of communication into validity domains closed off Habermas from accessing the performative-ritual dimension of Ki-

---

22   Rosati, "The Archaic and Us", 365,367.

23   Rosati, "Kinds of Ritual and the Place of Transcendence", 46.

24   Habermas, *Auch eine Geschichte der Philosophie. Vol. 1. Die okzidentale Konstellation von Glauben und Wissen. Vol. 2. Vernünftige Freiheit. Spuren des Diskurses über Glauben und Wissen* cited in Mendieta, "The Axial Age, Social Evolution, and Postsecular Consciousness", 301

25   Rosati, "The Archaic and Us", 366.

erkegaard's existence-communication.[26] Because he admits to be religiously tone-deaf, Habermas is less flexible or more conservative in how or where he can hear the surviving entry of secular modernity into the ritual mind today. It is true that "ritual survives in the communal cult practices of world religions"; that "religions do not survive without the cultic practices of a congregation"; and that without ritual life, religions become just so many ethical forms of life and normative systems of values. But it is not so that "in modernity, … [the First Axial Age religions] are the only configuration of spirit or intellectual formation that still has access to the world of experience of ritual in the strict sense".[27]

If we affirm that rituals founded the myth and then in turn underwrote the First Axial Age religions, then *Homo Ritualis*, some 300–100,000 B.P.,[28] antedates the First Cognitive Revolution and origins of fictive languages defining the *Sapiens* in 70,000 B.P. Is not the archaic ritual origin of the *Homo Sapiens,* as it undergirds phylogenetically the First Cognitive Revolution, also a precursor to any institutionalized religious formations that follow the emergence of myth, fictive languages, and the Agricultural Revolution? But then there were no established institutional religions prior to the First Axial Age. Humans were able to access the ritual mind by inventing and practicing rituals, then translating them into mythical stories, enacting them in new beliefs, and building scaffolding for architectures of theories.

If the First Axial religions and their value systems are now under pressures of another Cognitive Revolution, must we not allow *in principle* that there be new rituals emerging from the transvaluation of these dying established cultic practices? Why must Habermas[29] mock new spiritual movements as mere "Californian gimcrackery" marred by "syncretism" that they share with "the

---

26   See Martin B. Matuštík, "Habermas's Reading of Kierkegaard: Notes from a Conversation", *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 17, no. 4 (1993); Martin B. Matuštík, "Kierkegaard as Socio-Political Thinker and Activist", *Man and World* 27, no. 2 (1994); Matuštík, "Derrida and Habermas on the Aporia of the Politics of Identity and Difference"; Martin B. Matuštík, *Jürgen Habermas: A Philosophical-Political Profile* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001); Martin B. Matuštík, *Postnational Identity: Critical Theory and Existential Philosophy in Habermas, Kierkegaard, and Havel* (New Critical Theory, 2013), 92–97, 103, 116–126. Martin B. Matuštík and Merold Westphal, eds., *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity* (Indiana Unive. Press, 1995), 245–253.

27   Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking ll*, 65.

28   Ibid., 45, 64.

29   Ibid., 156.

Evangelicals" and many a world-wide sect in "a de-institutionalized form of religious observance"?[30] What is so precious about institutionalized religions, particularly the Protestant largely deritualized form Habermas privileges, when it comes to accessing the archaic ritual mind at this time of Axial transitions? Would not translations of rituals to myths to theory be *by definition* what the First Axial Age accomplished without any established religious institutions? Must not our need for Axial rebirths not only recover the old but also nurture the new to life again? If we envision that our time is undergoing a new Cognitive Revolution, would not this evolution break the bounds of received religions? Wouldn't we be reinventing human origins while sparring with the algorithmic revolution we are experiencing now?[31]

Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, among others, as I now understand their nineteenth century hermeneutics of suspicion and genealogy of values, are the early prophets announcing a new Axial Age. Viable rituals will not be found necessarily in religious houses and established congregations that have become so many sepulchres of gods, nor will they succeed as undertakers digging up dead gods and devalued values for fundamentalist resurrections. Our modern civilizations have been killing and burying classical revelations and inherited traditions. The new values and human solidarities are already being invented and performed in counterpoints to the algorithms of the self-hacking *Homo Deus*.[32]

With Habermas's turn to the ritual archaic dimension of speech, we come to appreciate not only Kierkegaard's rethinking of myth and theology, but also the general place of new rituals in contemporary returns of the "spiritual but not religious." My earlier criticism of Habermas's translation-linguistification

30   Habermas holds this prejudice consistently, reserving the meaning of religion only for major cults and judging new social movements against the received dominant institutionalized religions of the First Axial Age (Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking ll*, 43 125, 156, 160 n. 86, 212.).

31   See Robert N. Bellah and Hans Joas, eds., *The Axial Age and its consequences* (Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 2012); Alex Blasdel, "Reckoning for Our Species: [Timothy Morton] the Philosopher Prophet of the Anthropocene", *The Guardian*, 2017 June 15; Karl Jasper, "The Axial Age of Human History: A Base for the Unity of Mankind", *Commentary*, no. 6 (1948); Yves Lambert, "Religion in Modernity as a New Axial Age: Secularization or New Religious Forms?", *Sociology of Religion* 60, no. 3 (1999); Mendieta, "The Axial Age, Social Evolution, and Postsecular Consciousness"; Eduardo Mendieta, "The Postsecular Condition and the Genealogy of Postmetaphysical Thinking", in *The Routledge Handbook of Postsecularity*, ed. Justin Beaumont (Routledge, 2019).

32   Harari, *Homo Deus*.

model was rooted in phenomenological evidence whereby Kierkegaard offers insights into an inward mode of communication. Kierkegaard, too, translates religious myths and beliefs but he achieves this with a nonreductionist dual outcome of reflective faith and existential mode of speech acts. Habermas's 1987 Copenhagen question to Kierkegaard can no longer be primarily about posttraditional identity and deliberative institutions safeguarding individual singularity. It is a query about what in the postsecular condition takes the place of rituals in relation to reflective faith and in sync with postmetaphysical thinking.

That so many people in the West and globally call themselves "spiritual but not religious" indicates not merely something sociological, that we live in the postsecular condition, but also something foundational about *Homo Sapiens:* If ritual and myth form two ur-origins of communicative action, then spiritualities are never just distilled from a linguistified sacred, e.g., the First Axial values. To desire a drink of pure absinth of postmetaphysical thinking has been the secularist and scientist dream rightly exposed by Habermas's postsecular turn. To imagine that reflective faith dwells in received cults of established Axial religions as a static placeholder for accessing untamed resources of ritual and myth, this too is tone-deafness or "Enlightenment fundamentalism".[33]

II.2 Single Sacred Complex, Plural Cognitive Revolutions, and Inverse Singularities

Habermas[34] proposes that an archaic ritual formation of the *Sapiens* antedates the first Cognitive Revolution that gave birth to communicative competencies. This thesis underscores what is at stake in what may be our Second Cognitive Revolution. At stake is human "nature" in the age of singularity when data (infotech) interfaces with will to power (biotech).

Habermas claims that ritual and myth form the *Sapiens*' archaic sacred complex. As co-origins of the linguistic competencies and human cooperation that emerge, due most likely to a minor mutation around 70,000 B.P., this sacred complex survives in our social evolutionary make up to the present. If this hypothesis about human genesis can be confirmed reconstructively, then

---

33   Cf. Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking ll*, 218.

34   Habermas, *Auch eine Geschichte der Philosophie. Vol. 1. Die okzidentale Konstellation von Glauben und Wissen. Vol. 2. Vernünftige Freiheit. Spuren des Diskurses über Glauben und Wissen.*

neither the biological (e.g., emotional) nor the cybernetic (e.g., the AI that translates emotions into emoticons) algorithms are the sole vanishing event-horizons of *Sapiens'* social evolution. The other event-horizons are ritual practices. "With ritual practice we associate the meaning of warding off danger and surmounting crises, including the existential experience of death".[35]

Habermas reframes how to think about the linguistification of sacred. Before (1987) linguistification equalled one-sided rationalization yielding a thorough secularization:

> [Now] "linguistification" can only mean discovering the still vital semantic potentials in religious traditions and translating them into a general language that is accessible beyond the boundaries of particular religious communities — and thereby introducing them into the discursive play of public reasons. But that which is not translated from within [by rituals or liturgical practices] provides a different access to reflective faith.[36]

We can replace dialectic of myth and enlightenment with genealogy of faith and metaphysical knowledge[37]: "Can we know whether the linguistification of the sacred, which took place over the millennia in the work on myth, religion and metaphysics, has run its course and has come to a close"?[38] One branch of this genealogical root leads to postmetaphysical thinking that differentiates the background lifeworlds into worldviews and translates the sacred complex into validity domains of communication. The other branch yields reflective faith that is "continuing the 'theological' linguistification of the sacred".[39] *Sapiens* constituted its archaic intersubjective worlds through the motor coordination of communal activity. But with first articulations of rituals in art, fictive languages, and myth, humans created their initial shared symbolic worlds. Reconstructing a single receding archaic sacred complex of *Homo Sapiens*, Habermas hopes to verify the primacy of communicative over instrumental, functional, and algorithmic rationality. The bio-infotech singularity must retain this communicative primacy to remain decidedly human.

The two branches of genealogy join in a singular root metaphysics and monotheism, under the sacred myth-ritual complex. This common root forks

---

35   Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking ll*, 45.
36   Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking ll*, xiv.
37   Mendieta, "The Axial Age, Social Evolution, and Postsecular Consciousness", 291f.
38   Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking ll*, xiii, 66.
39   Ibid., xiv.

out through universalist theory to postmetaphysical thinking and through the First Axial religions to reflective faith. This analysis points to the sui generis role of rituals in human origins as well as in the human future.

III. WHICH AXIAL AGE, WHOSE RITUALS?

Habermas admits now that reflective faith, and not just reason, is responsible for the specific "theological" linguistification of the sacred. Yet curiously, while theorizing a genealogy with one common root and two parallel and nonreducible branches of reason and faith, Habermas does not take seriously Jaspers[40] and others who anticipate the Second Axial Age.[41] Instead he harkens to archaic rituals preserved in cultic practices, witness, and faith of our contemporaries practicing the First Axial religions.

Given that ritual practices phylogenetically underwrite the emergence of linguistic intersubjectivity, how can the secularized *Sapiens* access that phylogenetic evolution in the living performatives today? Or will not tone-deafness afflict not merely Habermas but also new atheists and then every *Homo Deus*? To become *a religiously tone-deaf human g-d*, I only need to produce and consume mindless algorithms generated by AI *that*, not a *who*, no longer needs human solidarity with the bedrock access to ritual pathos of love and death. "These experiences remain closed to those of us who are tone deaf when it comes to religion".[42]

Habermas refuses to become defeatist about the Anthropocene: We can access the archaic origins in communicative interaction. We can access those ritual-dimensions ontogenetically in the living cultic practices of the First Axial religionists. He argues against his own declared and our threatened tone-deafness: "[R]itual practice has survived, albeit in a transformed

---

40   Jasper, "The Axial Age of Human History".

41   Lambert, "Religion in Modernity as a New Axial Age"; See sequel to this paper, Martin Matustik, "Which Axial Age, Whose Rituals? Habermas and Jaspers on the 'Spiritual' Situation of the Present Age." Forthcoming in http://folia-eap.uni.lodz.pl/en/home/; Mendieta, "The Axial Age, Social Evolution, and Postsecular Consciousness"; Turner, "Ritual, Belief and Habituation: Religion and Religions from the Axial Age to the Anthropocene"; Bronislaw Szerszynski, "From the Anthropocene Epoch to a new Axial Age: Using Theory-Fictions to Explore Geo-Spiritual Realities", in *Religion in the Anthropocene*, ed. Celia Deane-Drummond et al. (Cascade Books, 2017).

42   Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking ll*, 76.

guise".[43] There is soft naturalism implied in the irreducible sacred complex of ritual and myth. It reappears in the linkages of First Axial theologies and rationalized theory, then again, we encounter it today in the two surviving branches of reflective faith and postmetaphysical thinking. Yet soft naturalism is not entirely at the disposal of rational translation. This is because in that translation of sacred traditions to profane validity domains, there appear no residues. Secularisation is seemingly complete. And if secularization could become fully decoupled from the lifeworld, the vanishing point would be secularism of AI.

Habermas holds out for contemporary rituals and liturgies as the participatory, first-person performative media, whereby the semantic contents that inform our ethical life and moral thinking are regenerated and made available.[44] Postmetaphysical thinking and major religions of the First Axial Age share archaic genealogy that is not accessible from within the observer's perspective and its secularist frame.[45] Habermas appeals to "a form of religion that preserves its vitality even under the changed cognitive constellation of modernity" because this vitality alone, he says, provides our times with a lived access to the archaic sacred complex.[46] Thus, the secular citizens must not only tolerate and respect such centres of old cultic practices, faith witness, and ritual vitality. They must also allow for the possibility that "'modernizing' self-enlightenment of religious consciousness" can find resources to translate and communicate *Sapiens'* human ur-origins from within the "sacred complex" we have inherited, yet not exhausted. The translations must become not only postmetaphysically "reflexive" (as if only observed through secularist windows) but also "still the 'true' faith" for those who participate and performatively access archaic ritual reality.[47]

"This complementarity establishes a contemporaneity between the two intellectual formations which precludes the devaluation of religion".[48] In the situation of the present age, if we became socially integrated without residue by the algorithms of AI, would we not lose this access to archaic sources of

---

43   Ibid., 56.
44   Mendieta, "The Postsecular Condition and the Genealogy of Postmetaphysical Thinking".
45   Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking ll*, 78.
46   Ibid., 124.
47   Ibid., 133.
48   Ibid., 81.

social solidarity? Said differently, would we know ourselves mindfully as human? "I am convinced that human forms of civilised social life can neither be established nor maintained without this kind of self-transcendence that creates distance from occurrences in the world".[49]

The dialectical character of the human origins in ritual and myth perhaps safeguards us from outsourcing our aware intersubjective intelligence to supraintelligent algorithms *that, not a who,* no longer know nor require ritual coordination of data. "But without an appeal to revelation or to some form of contact of the believer with the divine, be it through prayer, ascetic practice or meditation, 'faith' would lose its specific character, namely, its rootedness in religious modes of dealing with 'Heil' and 'Unheil'".[50]

III.1 Remainders and Boundaries of the Human in the Age of AI

Our future search must articulate a dialectic of rituals and algorithms in order to discover remainders and boundaries of the human event that are not reducible to or exhausted by algorithms. AI increasingly claims to know us better than we know ourselves. We can reconstruct what AI cannot know only if *one is* human and *it* is not. That which remains or resists algorithms as their boundary are so many resources of our mindfulness. Among these are the ritual, meditative, creative, aware mind. We will not read these remainders and boundaries necessarily off the forms of understanding in myths, theologies, and postmodern thought-formations, as these too will be hacked by human evolving intelligent designers. Hackers of minds also become data devoured in the memory banks of new algorithms. We need to focus on the ritual, meditative, creative, aware mind as our contemporary ur-origins.

The question to ask is not about complementing a postconventional singular individual with secular political institutions and the mainstream First Axial cults. Rather, following through Habermas's doors, it behoves us to examine how linguistification of traditions opens two parallel paths: postmetaphysical thinking and reflective faith. Once through that door, recognizing the parallel branches of secularization and critical religiosity, we are ready to inquire whether and how reflective faith in its experimental stages creates "the Anthropocenic" rituals for new theologies and philosophies of the Second Axial Age.

---

49   Ibid., 82.
50   Ibid., 116.

Questions before us are some of the following:

- How do we access the performative-ritual dimension of existence-communication (one of the ur-origins of communicative interaction) that has been barred by one-sided secularism and overdetermined by claims of rationalisation and linguistification?

- What postsecular rituals are viable and necessary to secure human communicative interaction and solidarity at the time of the Second Cognitive Revolution?

- What is the role of reflective faith, "religion without religion," in articulating and enabling the translation of new rituals into the Second Axial Age myths and theories?

- What are the future vanishing points of the genealogy of the sacred complex whereby postmetaphysical thinking and prereflective postsecular rituals continue to rationalize reflective faith as well as nourish critical theory?

THE HUMAN EVENT   FUTURE

... A   N   T   H   R   O   P   O   C   E   N   E ...
12,500.   H   O   L   O   C   E   N   E
SECOND COGNITIVE REVOLUTION
SINGULARITY: INTELLIGENT DESIGN = EVOLUTION
A.I.: INFOTECH & BIOTECH / THE GREAT ACCELERATION
BIG DATA & ALGORITHMS
GENETIC CODE & CLONING
1945 A.D. TRINITY TEST
1900s A.D. – DARWIN, HEGEL, MARX
1781 A.D. STEAM ENGINE
1609 A.D. TELESCOPE

2nd AXIAL AGE? HOMO DEUS?[1]
NEW RITUALS
INTEGRAL MIND
EXISTENCE PRECEDES ESSENCE
REFLECTIVE INTERFAITH
POSTSECULAR & ALTERNATIVE COMMUNITIES
POSTMETAPHYSICAL THINKING[2]

MODERN REVOLUTIONS
DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISM
INDUSTRIAL CAPITALISM
FRENCH & AMERICAN
HISTORICAL
INDUSTRIAL
SCIENTIFIC
1st AXIAL AGE: HOMO IMAGO DEI
MONOTHEISMS
HEBREW PROPHETS
BUDDHISM
TAOISM
CONFUCIUS
GREEK PHILOSOPHY
ETHICAL UNIVERSALISM & LAW
AGRICULTURAL REVOLUTION
SAPIENS SUPREME
NEANDERTHAL & SAPIENS
COGNITIVE REVOLUTION
HOMO RITUALIS[3] HOMO SAPIENS

---

[1] Harari 2016.
[2] Habermas 2019.
[3] Habermas 2017, 64.

300,000/	200,00/	70,000/	30,000,/	13,000,/	12,500/	2,800 - 2,200/	500/	300/	200/	100/
13.5. BIL/	4.5 BIL /				10,000		YEARS BEFORE NOW			
BIG BANG/	EARTH				CREATIONIST YOUNG EARTH					

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bellah, Robert N., and Hans Joas, eds. 2012. *The Axial Age and its consequences*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press.

Blasdel, Alex. 2017 June 15. "Reckoning for Our Species: [Timothy Morton] the Philosopher Prophet of the Anthropocene". *The Guardian*, 2017 June 15.

Durkheim, Émile. 1995. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. New York, NY: Free Press.

Habermas, Jürgen. 1986. *Autonomy and Solidarity: Interviews with Jürgen Habermas*. Edited by Peter Dews. London: Verso.

—. 1987. *The Theory of Communivative Action, Vol. 2*. London: Heinemann.

—. 1989. *The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historians' Debate*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

—. 1990. "Justice and Solidarity". In *The Moral Domain: Essays in the Ongoing Discussion Between Philosophy and the Social Sciences*, edited by Gertrud Nunner-Winkler, Thomas E. Wren and Wolfgang Edelstein, 224–52. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.

—. 1990. *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

—. 1993. *Justification and Application: Remarks on Discourse Ethics*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

—. 2003. *The Future of Human Nature*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

—. 2008. *Between Naturalism and Religion*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

—. 2017. *Postmetaphysical Thinking ll*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

—. 2019. *Auch eine Geschichte der Philosophie. Vol. 1. Die okzidentale Konstellation von Glauben und Wissen. Vol. 2. Vernünftige Freiheit. Spuren des Diskurses über Glauben und Wissen*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag.

Harari, Yovel N. 2015. *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.

—. 2016. *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.

Jasper, Karl. 1948. "The Axial Age of Human History: A Base for the Unity of Mankind". *Commentary*, no. 6: 430–35.

Lambert, Yves. 1999. "Religion in Modernity as a New Axial Age: Secularization or New Religious Forms?". *Sociology of Religion* 60, no. 3: 303–33.

Matuštík, Martin B. 1993. "Habermas's Reading of Kierkegaard: Notes from a Conversation". *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 17, no. 4: 313–23.

—. 1994. "Kierkegaard as Socio-Political Thinker and Activist". *Man and World* 27, no. 2: 211–24.

—. 1995. "Derrida and Habermas on the Aporia of the Politics of Identity and Difference: Towards Radical Democratic Multiculturalism". *Constellations: An International Journal of Critical and Democratic Theory* 1, no. 3: 383–98.

—. 2001. *Jürgen Habermas: A Philosophical-Political Profile*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

—. 2013. *Postnational Identity: Critical Theory and Existential Philosophy in Habermas, Kierkegaard, and Havel*. Phoenix, AZ: New Critical Theory.

—. 2019. "Kierkegaard". In *The Habermas Lexicon*, edited by Amy Allen and Eduardo Mendieta. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press.

—. 2019. "Stages, States, and Modes of Existence in Integral Critical Theory". In *Dancing with Sophia: Integral Philosophy on the Verge*, edited by Michael Schwartz and Sean Esbjörn-Hargens, 21–57. New York, NY: State Univ. of New York Press.

—. 2019. "Which Axial Age, Whose Rituals? Habermas and Jaspers on the 'Spiritual' Situation of the Present Age." Forthcoming in *Folia Philosophica*.

Matuštík, Martin B., and Merold Westphal, eds. 1995. *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity*. Indianapolis, IN: Indiana Unive. Press.

Mendieta, Eduardo. 2018. "The Axial Age, Social Evolution, and Postsecular Consciousness". *Critical Research on Religion* 6, no. 3.

—. 2019. "The Postsecular Condition and the Genealogy of Postmetaphysical Thinking". In *The Routledge Handbook of Postsecularity*, edited by Justin Beaumont, 51–58. London: Routledge.

Rappaport, Roy. 1999. *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge Univ. Press.

Rosati, Massimo. 2009. *Ritual and the Sacred: A Neo-Durkheimian Analysis of Politics, Religion and the Self*. Farnham: Ashgate.

—. 2010. "Kinds of Ritual and the Place of Transcendence". *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 36, no. 1: 45–48.

—. 2014. "The Archaic and Us: Ritual, Myth, the Sacred and Modernity". *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 40, no. 4–5: 363–68.

Seligman, Adam. B. 2000. *Modernity's Wager*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press.

—. 2010. "A reply to my critics". *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 36, no. 1: 67–91.

Szerszynski, Bronislaw. 2017. "From the Anthropocene Epoch to a new Axial Age: Using Theory-Fictions to Explore Geo-Spiritual Realities". In *Religion in the Anthropocene*, edited by Celia Deane-Drummond et al., 35–52. Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books.

Turner, Bryan S. 2017. "Ritual, Belief and Habituation: Religion and Religions from the Axial Age to the Anthropocene". *European Journal of Social Theory* 20, no. 1: 132–45.

Wilber, Ken. 1997. "An integral Theory of Consciousness". *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 4, no. 1: 71–92.

—. 2001. "On the Nature of a Postmetaphysical Spirituality: Response to Habermas and Weis". Accessed August 6. http://wilber.shambhala.com/html/misc/habermas/index.cfm/.

—. 2006. *Integral Spirituality: A Startling New Role for Religion in the Modern and Postmodern World*. Boston, MA: Shambhala.