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Faith in (Prophetic) Philosophy beyond the Boundaries of “Good” and “Bad” Religion

Abstract

Max Horkheimer concludes *Eclipse of Reason* with a call for “faith in philosophy.” He contends that the purpose of philosophy is to translate the suffering of martyrs into a broadly understandable idiom through which to express a critique of instrumental reason and its destructive potential. Horkheimer concludes *Eclipse of Reason* having offered scant details of how this translation project should work. Moreover, if readers take seriously Horkheimer’s insistence upon philosophy as an object of faith, then his project risks being saddled with an untenable distinction between “good” and “bad” religion. I describe an avenue whereby the details of Horkheimer’s translation project might be fleshed out, including freeing it from the good/bad distinction that threatens to undermine its feasibility. I contend that the figure of the Hebrew prophet serves as a model of the individual who critiques oppressive social systems, and I argue that Cornel West’s description of cultural workers as critical organic catalysts offers a model for such critique in a modern

Western context. Given some surprising parallels between Horkheimer's thought and Al-Qaeda members' self-descriptions—in particular, regarding the power and importance of suffering—I contend that the realization of Horkheimer's philosophical project offers a promising avenue for nonviolent engagement with religious extremism in the era of the Global War on Terror.

Keywords
Al-Qaeda, Cornel West, Faisal Devji, global war on terror, Max Horkheimer, pragmatism, terrorism

Introduction

I presented the initial draft of this paper at the *Power/Religion* conference in St. Petersburg, Russia, on September 12, 2013. Over the past decade-plus, residents of the United States have grown accustomed to the attacks of September 11, 2001 casting a long shadow over our public discourse. Delivering these thoughts on the current state of Western engagement with Islamic militancy, on the heels of yet another anniversary of those events, was no exception. As I prepare this revised version for publication in September 2014, the US government has once again sent its military into Iraq, this time against the Islamic State, itself the offspring of the insurgent group commonly known as Al-Qaeda in Iraq. Over the decade-plus period of the US government's War on Terror, however, US-based discourse about violent extremism has, at times, not seemed to move far beyond simplistic dichotomies of "good" (i.e., the United States and its allies) versus "bad" (i.e., Islamic militants and their supporters). In a speech given before a Joint Session of the United States Congress just over a week after the September 11 attacks, then-President George W. Bush reinforced this stark binary when—echoing, for some listeners, the words of Matthew 12:30—he declared to other governments, "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists."[1] Nevertheless this simplistic dichotomy, on which opponents of the United States are understood and quickly dismissed as "bad," precludes a more rigorous or sophisticated analysis whereby the United States and other Western nations might

[1] Matthew's Jesus says, "Whoever is not with me is against me" (Matt. 12:30, New Revised Standard Version [NRSV]). Notably, unlike the parallels at Mark 9:40 (the earliest of the canonical gospels), Luke 9:50 and POxy1224, in Matthew's version a person is presumed to be against Jesus and his movement until demonstrated otherwise, thus putting in place a general onus to prove one's loyalty to Jesus.

develop more promising strategies for dealing with the problem of violent extremism.

I contend that Max Horkheimer (1947: 162)—particularly in his advocacy for what he calls "faith in philosophy"—shares with many Islamic militants an opposition to the hegemony of means-end rationality, and thus that attending to this faith in philosophy might offer one potential avenue whereby Western powers might develop a new, nonviolent strategy for interacting with those who would oppose said powers by violent means. The way in which Horkheimer formulates his proposal, however, outlines broad themes but lacks specificity. Moreover, to the extent that a dichotomy of good versus bad religion remains at work in his thinking, Horkheimer's proposed faith in philosophy seems unable to move us fully beyond the simplistic discourse that other aspects of his work have the potential to help us overcome. Thus, I envision this article-length project to be narrow in scope—that is, pointing out places where Horkheimer's proposed faith in philosophy has already been at work, in order to make the broad strokes of Horkheimer's thinking slightly less broad, while also highlighting some pitfalls that a more robustly developed Horkheimerian proposal would have to avoid.

Why focus on Horkheimer at all, though? He is, after all, far from the first thinker to grapple with the problem of means-end (or instrumental) rationality. The question of whether instrumental rationality is the only requirement for a satisfactory practical rationality regarding what ought to be done can be traced back at least to Kant. Nevertheless, I will focus here on Horkheimer, first because Horkheimer's critique of instrumental rationality—which he developed along with Theodor Adorno (1988 [1944]) in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, in addition to his articulation of it in *Eclipse of Reason* (1947)—contains within it a prescient critique of modern institutions, particularly mass media. With regard to the search for a new way to address violent extremists who have themselves (as I describe in the following section) integrated the use of mass media into their tactics, Horkheimer's analysis of mass media offers the possibility of finding such an avenue. Moreover, using Horkheimer's faith in philosophy to help think through Islamic extremists' violent opposition to what they identify as the West's instrumentalization of persons—particularly on a reading of the relationship between the category of religion and Horkheimer's philosophical project posited by Roland Boer (2011)—offers the possibility of closing (or, at least, significantly shrinking) a vexing lacuna in Horkheimer's thought, identified by Georg Lohmann (1993). Lohmann notes that Horkheimer ultimately leaves unclear exactly how the various pieces of the constructive project that he outlines in *Eclipse of Reason* fit together. Working from Boer's contention that unresolved religious tensions permeate Horkheimer's writings, I contend that Horkheimer's own thought, like that of many would-be analysts of Al-Qaeda today, is plagued by a too-easy distinction between

"good" and "bad" religion. Eradicating this unhelpful distinction, I argue, opens up one avenue whereby those who want to continue Horkheimer's project might fill in the details of his proposal where Horkheimer himself offers only broad strokes.

A Provocative Suggestion

In *The Terrorist in Search of Humanity* (2008), Faisal Devji argues that Islamic militants (most notably Al-Qaeda) understand their violent acts to function as an alternative to the means-end rationality, hegemonic throughout the Western world, that instrumentalizes people. By looking carefully at Al-Qaeda members' self-descriptions in their own written documents, Devji contends that Islamic militants use terror as a tool to inflict a small sample of the suffering upon Western citizens that the militants and other Muslims have experienced daily at the hands of Western powers. They do this in the hope that experiencing such suffering will engender a sense of solidarity among citizens of Western nations with the Muslim world's plight. Attempts to engage Al-Qaeda militarily therefore inevitably fail, because the increase in suffering such violence produces, according to their logic, only creates the potential to engender further solidarity. In a very real sense, then, Al-Qaeda operatives conceive of themselves as the victors in any military engagement with Western powers, irrespective of whether they win or lose militarily; no matter how outmatched Al-Qaeda operatives may find themselves with regard to weapons or training, engagement in combat with them does not defeat them, and in fact only serves to embolden them. Western governments thus cannot curb Islamic terrorism unless we in the West develop our own alternative to instrumental rationality (which meets violence only with further violence).

Provocative in the extreme though it may be, Devji's 2008 thesis presents Islamic terrorist organizations to understand themselves as engaged in a humanitarian project, with both their motivating concerns and their methods bringing them into affinity with environmental and pacifist groups, even so far as with Gandhian nonviolent resistance. Devji first observes that both Islamic militants and environmental activists concentrate on "suprapolitical practices of an individual sort"; for example, "the environmentalist's resolve to minimize his carbon footprint is suprapolitical because its form of sacrifice cannot possibly make a difference to climate change, no matter how many people are inspired by his example" (2008: 79).[2] Second, he argues that while the most obvious comparisons

[2] It is, of course, not literally true that such sacrifices cannot possibly make a difference, no matter how many people they inspire to do likewise. Here I take Devji to have in mind the actual number of people that a non-famous environmentalist (i.e.,

between Islamic militancy and Gandhian nonviolence focus on a glaring difference—that the former embraces violence while the latter denounces it, a more fruitful ideal type by which to compare the two is suffering, and particularly the way it functions in each of them. Devji observes that, like Gandhi who was politically active on the Indian subcontinent before them, Al-Qaeda operatives use suffering and sacrifice to engender sympathy and solidarity. Whereas Gandhi and his followers endured suffering inflicted on their own bodies, Al-Qaeda operatives have inflicted that suffering on others—namely Western civilians, for whom Al-Qaeda agents intend acts of violence to be a call for solidarity. Thus, sacrifice "retrieves another sense of the human" (Devji 2008: 48); sympathy for those who endure suffering reminds its observers of the common humanity that they share. From this realization of a shared humanity arises an awareness of the reality of global humanity which makes it possible for global humanity to become an agent of history rather than its victim, counteracting the reduction of humanity's members to mere exchange values to be instrumentalized and expended.

How should those living in Western nations targeted by Al-Qaeda respond to a thesis as provocative as Devji's? The impulse that many of us understandably share is to dismiss it as an impossible suggestion. Nevertheless, it is important to pull apart two separate questions: first, is Devji correct in his analysis that the humanitarian parallels with Gandhian nonviolence are an accurate description of Islamic militants' own self-understanding? Second, are those militants correct about the effect their violent tactics have on their targeted societies? We may, and I in fact do, affirm the former while denying the latter. While critical scholars of religion have a responsibility not to simply take at face value religious practitioners' self-descriptions (i.e., by uncritically affirming the correctness of Islamic militants themselves regarding the effects of their tactics), we likewise have a responsibility not to be completely dismissive of emic accounts simply because those accounts inspire outrage in people who occupy social locations near to our own. As Russell McCutcheon (2006) argues, there is a temptation among Western scholars of religion to be far more willing to entertain the self-descriptions of religious actors whose ideological agendas are closely aligned with our own than to extend the same privilege to actors whose agendas are opposed to ours. Thus, while we certainly should not take at face value the writings of Al-Qaeda members that Devji cites or simply assume the accuracy of those self-understandings, we also have a duty as scholars not to dismiss them summarily,

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one whose sacrifices won't be highly publicized and therefore won't be known to anyone outside her own social circle) could, on any realistic estimation, influence. Of course, if an environmentalist were to inspire literally *all* people, that would be quite a different story. But, aside from a small handful of highly visible advocates for the environmentalist cause, that is not even remotely possible.

but rather to take them seriously and critically interrogate them and the rhetoric contained in them.

Devji's work is not without its shortcomings, as several reviewers have noted. Most important for present purposes, as Keith Stanski (2009) points out, Devji arguably does not ultimately show enough evidence to fully vindicate his claim that Islamic extremists have shifted away from particular local and national concerns to more universal, global ones. In spite of the shortcomings of Devji's argument, the overstatement of his case can still arguably be taken as an instance of what Jonathan Z. Smith (as of March 7, 2015, n.d.) calls "an exaggeration in the direction of truth"—in this case, via provocation, in the direction away from easy but common explanations of Islamic extremism that invoke an allegedly irrational essence of Islamic fundamentalism or violent essence of religion as such. Thus, while Devji certainly constructs his reading of Islamic militants according to his own experience and theoretical commitments, I contend that there is value to his argumentative move locating Al-Qaeda so that they fit right in with figures like Gandhi—whom we in the West are far more likely to celebrate than to condemn. The act of redescribing Al-Qaeda's agenda in terms that have a deliberate ring of familiarity to us has the potential to defamiliarize Al-Qaeda for Western citizens, calling into question the insistence upon a sharp distinction between Al-Qaeda's and Westerners' ideological agendas (and thus forces those of us in the West to reconsider what may have at first struck us as seemingly obvious assumptions).

Al-Qaeda's members' and leaders' self-understanding, as Devji reconstructs, echoes many themes familiar to readers of Max Horkheimer: he too is opposed to the hegemony of means-end rationality because of its tendency to facilitate the domination and instrumentalization of human persons. Moreover, like Al-Qaeda operatives, he insists that human suffering plays a key role in the opposition to such means-end rationality. Horkheimer nevertheless would hardly be counted among the supporters of Al-Qaeda's strategy of inflicting that suffering on those whom just war theorists would identify as innocent victims such as noncombatants, including children.[3] His proposal, as described in *Eclipse of Reason* (1947),

[3] If we grant that US foreign policy, particularly regarding the use of the US military in recent Middle Eastern conflicts, has inflicted harm on Muslims (via death, injury, displacement or the introduction of new forms of political or infrastructural instability), then questions of who is (and who is not) responsible for those actions and policies, as well as their effects, are not so straightforward. (Here I set aside the question of whether any such uses of force by the US military have been unjust; that question of justice notwithstanding, though, it is uncontroversial that the use of military power and weaponry inflicts harm.) The US government is, after all, designed as a government of, by, and for the people of the United States, and surely there is some sense in which US citizens can plausibly be called upon to be held responsible for the deci-

instead subjects reason itself to a thoroughgoing critique that, by attending to human suffering, yields a history and a genealogy of its own concepts. This genealogical project contains the potential to transform our language and realize its potential for giving voice to those who suffer voicelessly, so that those with privilege might stand in solidarity with them. Yet, as Georg Lohmann (1993) argues, it is unclear how Horkheimer intends to fit these disparate pieces—solidarity with suffering, a genealogy of concepts, the transformation of language as a voice for the voiceless—into a coherent whole. The incompleteness of his project leaves a global political void, constantly at risk of being filled by other alternatives to instrumental rationality, for example that of Islamic militants.

Working extensively from the writings of Karl Jaspers and Hannah Arendt, Devji argues that the specter of total destruction—of the globe and humanity, via either nuclear annihilation or environmental catastrophe—has brought into being a new, global humanity. In Devji's view, humanity "is now no longer an ideal or an abstraction, but a reality too insofar as it is capable of being destroyed" (2008: 12). Now it is no longer tenable to assume that the weal and woe of individual nations and peoples can rise or fall independently of others'; instead, with regard to the most serious challenges that threaten to destroy humanity, the fate of all its members are inextricably bound together. Thus, if critiques of instrumental rationality by Horkheimer and other thinkers associated with the Frankfurt School are correct, finding a viable alternative to instrumental rationality is of utmost importance. Nevertheless, if we hope to find such an alternative that does not lead to the hastening of our destruction (as the alternative proposed by Islamic militants threatens to do), then we in the West must seek out new modes of engagement with Al-Qaeda. We must, in fact, embrace an extremism of our own: an extremism for love toward those who would declare us to be their enemies.

In the years since the attacks of September 11, 2001, the governments of the United States and other Western nations have struggled to find a response to Islamic terrorism and other varieties of ideological extremism. There were, of course, the expected military interventions—first in Afghanistan and eventually in Pakistan, where members of the United States Naval Special Warfare Development Group unit acting under the authority of the Central Intelligence Agency located and killed Osama bin Laden. The US government's Global War on Terror (GWOT)

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sions of the officials they elect. To what extent, though, is such responsibility mitigated by the dearth of viable candidates for national office who genuinely oppose extensive American intervention into the affairs of the Muslim world, or the fact that many such decisions are made by unelected appointees rather than elected officials? These are interesting and complicated questions, but at the very least, I take it as obvious that there is some meaningful and morally relevant sense in which the civilian victims of terrorist attacks are innocent of the offenses against which such acts protest.

also drew its military forces into Iraq under the (now proven false) assumption that Saddam Hussein's regime had links to, and provided material support to Al-Qaeda. In fact, no operational relationship between Hussein's Ba'athist regime and Al-Qaeda was ever substantiated; while then-US President George W. Bush insisted that Iraq itself was the "central front" in the GWOT, the toppling of Hussein's regime opened a power vacuum into which many new power contenders stepped—among them a new organization calling itself Al-Qaeda in Iraq, a franchise of sorts, connected to bin Laden's organization only by the fact that the new organization sought to trade on the cachet of the notoriety and name recognition that bin Laden's Al-Qaeda had. While purported to be substantial, connections between Al-Qaeda and Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq proved to be illusory, with post-invasion Iraq becoming instructive to the global political situation—particularly regarding the role of violent extremism—at the dawn of the twenty-first century. According to Devji, because of this specter of nuclear or environmental destruction, "a global society has come into being, but possesses as yet no political institutions proper to its name, and [...] new forms of militancy, like that of Al-Qaeda, achieve meaning in this institutional vacuum, while representing in their own way the search for a global politics" (2008: 8). The creation of Al-Qaeda in Iraq (and, eventually, the Islamic State, operating as of fall 2014 in Iraq and Syria) and other insurgent groups in postwar Iraq was but one of the most vivid recent examples of this institutional power vacuum and the often-militant search for meaning that emerges within it.

Horkheimer's Faith in Philosophy

As previously observed, readers of Max Horkheimer will note some shared themes between Devji's analysis of militant Islamic extremism and Horkheimer's comments about the relationship between suffering and liberation in *Eclipse of Reason* (1947). At the end of the fourth chapter, "Rise and Decline of the Individual," Horkheimer—working largely from the thinking of Arthur Schopenhauer—concludes that those who suffer in the course of resistance to oppression are the "real individuals" and "unsung heroes" of society, who "consciously expose their existence as individuals to the terroristic annihilation that others undergo unconsciously through the social process"; such martyrs are "the symbols of the humanity that is striving to be born" (1947: 109). As Georg Lohmann (1993: 392) observes, for Horkheimer autonomous subjects bear on their bodies the destructiveness of the means-end rationality that is hegemonic in modern, Western societies (and exported to societies outside the West via military power, on the one hand, and cultural and economic hegemony on the other) and that reduces human individuals to mere means. Hork-

heimer's "real individuals" function in much the same way as the sacrificial victims of Al-Qaeda's terrorist acts, in that their suffering functions both as a protest against instrumental rationality and as a call to participate in a common humanity.

In Horkheimer's view, "the task of philosophy is to translate what [martyrs] have done into language that will be heard, even though their finite voices have been silenced by tyranny" (1947: 161). Through such a translation project, Horkheimer seems to hope that a thorough and compelling critique of instrumental reason and its destructive potential might emerge. As Lohmann (1993: 405) points out, though, Horkheimer "does not really take up the task he has set for himself" in describing the details of how exactly such a critical translation project should work. Elsewhere in his discussion of the rise and decline of the individual, Horkheimer insists that "there are still some forces of resistance left" (1947: 141) within humanity, whose spirit is still alive not within social groups but only in individuals insofar as they are left alone. In describing the role of philosophy, Horkheimer seems to have in mind a shared project rather than a solitary activity. Lohmann's observation regarding the incompleteness of Horkheimer's philosophical project notwithstanding, Horkheimer himself uses a curious phrase to describe his own disposition toward the project. Whereas Lohmann (1993: 387) notes that Horkheimer wrote *Eclipse of Reason* as a self-criticism of the Frankfurt School project attempting to better society via the realization of the working class's historical agency, Horkheimer himself does not seem to conclude *Eclipse of Reason* on such a pessimistic note. In the final chapter, "On the Concept of Philosophy," Horkheimer instead offers a declaration of faith, or rather "faith in philosophy," which "means the refusal to permit fear to stunt in any way one's capacity to think" (1947: 162).

On what basis, though, does Horkheimer profess this faith? Is Horkheimer's faith in philosophy, as the author of the epistle to the Hebrews put it, "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things unseen" (Heb. 11:1, NRSV)? Is it, as Roland Boer (2011) puts it, a matter of superstition that Horkheimer is unable to get past? It would be difficult to mount a compelling case that Horkheimer's faith in philosophy here rests on the basis that the project he has in mind can be successful. It may strike us as incredibly strange that Horkheimer's proposal, in the end, settles on this "faith in philosophy." His definition of such faith (viz., "the refusal to permit fear to stunt in any way one's capacity to think") harks back to the rallying cry that, borrowing from Horace, Immanuel Kant (1997 [1784]: 17) proclaims in his essay "What is Enlightenment?" as a slogan for the Enlightenment itself: *Sapere aude!* (Dare to think!) Elsewhere, though, Horkheimer casts serious doubts on the Enlightenment project's prospects for success. Most famously, at the beginning of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, he and Theodor Adorno lament that although the Enlightenment "aimed to liberate human beings from fear and install

them as masters," in fact, "the whole enlightened earth radiates with disaster triumphant" (1988 [1944]: 2). The project of the Enlightenment, after all, created the conditions that eventually led to the hegemony of instrumental rationality and with it the fungibility of human persons. Moreover, even in its attempts to secure humans against such instrumentalization (e.g., most notably, in the development of liberal political theory and its regime of individual sovereignty and individual rights), many of Enlightenment philosophy's architects were confident that its conceptual resources could lead to the development of universally persuasive and effective arguments against such abuses. In actuality, Western liberalism has not succeeded in that project of universal persuasion. It would therefore be strange indeed if Horkheimer were to throw his support behind the very intellectual forces of the Enlightenment that led to the emergence of instrumental reason who then proved unable to stop its advance.

The attempt to ascertain with any specificity what Horkheimer has in mind with his avowed "faith in philosophy" is further complicated by a lack of clarity regarding who is to take up this project of philosophy as he conceives it. Throughout the chapter "Rise and Decline of the Individual," Horkheimer argues that, given the pervasiveness and near-inescapability of the culture industry throughout Western societies, there are few spaces left for resistance to instrumental rationality, and such resistance is available only to solitary individuals insofar as they are able to disconnect themselves from society and be left alone. In affirming the potential "faith in philosophy," one has to translate the experience of suffering into language that is broadly comprehensible, though, it seems that he envisions that project to be a shared rather than solitary one: It is a project of engagement with others, forming bonds of sympathy and solidarity through shared experiences, and working in partnership to communicate those experiences to a broader audience.

Horkheimer raises many questions in *Eclipse of Reason*, but offers precious few candidates to give answers given the scope and detail of the philosophical project he envisions. I suspect, however, that his chosen terminology—"*faith* in philosophy"—is no accident. For readers familiar with Horkheimer's writings on religion, his use of the term "faith" is indicative of his lifelong inability to step completely out of the shadow of religious (in particular, Jewish and Christian) thinking. Thus I propose that we turn to Horkheimer's writings on religion to move toward resolving the tensions that remain in place within the text of *Eclipse of Reason* itself. As Roland Boer (2011: 14) notes, in his later years Horkheimer wrote openly of his ability to profess the Jewish religion (Horkheimer himself uses the German verb, *bekennen*). I contend, then, that in his comments toward the end of *Eclipse of Reason* on having "faith in philosophy," we see Horkheimer struggling at the limits of what philosophy can do when cordoned off from that sphere that we, colloquially, identify

as "religious," and perhaps realizing—even if at this point only on an intuitive level—that in order to be completed, the project of human liberation requires a rejection of this sharp binary distinction between the categories of "religion" and "not religion." Elsewhere in his writings, Horkheimer affirms Marx's insight that religion is both an expression of, and a protest against, suffering. It should therefore not surprise us that in articulating a method of translating suffering into a broadly understandable language, even as he attempts to conceive that project solely in philosophical terms, he is unable to avoid language that we most likely would classify as "religious."

Prophetic Philosophy and its Challenges

Calling into question this commonly invoked "religion"/"not religion" distinction can also help resolve the tension between Horkheimer's insistence that it is the domain of solitary individuals to resist the hegemony of instrumental reason, and his proposal that such resistance must take the form of a collective, public project. In the ideal type of the prophet, we find a figure who meets both criteria. In Horkheimer's view, Jesus "thought little of prevailing rule and customs; he acted contrary to accepted ways; he was much closer to the heretic than the orthodox" (1974: 156). Along with the Old Testament prophets who preceded him, Jesus stood as an individual against a repressive social order (in his case, the occupying Roman Empire), not backing down even when remaining resolute came at a great—ultimate—personal cost. Nevertheless, the danger that prophets faced for maintaining such resolve came precisely from the fact that their stands were public: they spoke openly and defiantly in the faces of the powerful and attracted followers among the powerless. What does such prophetic talk have to do with philosophy, though? Horkheimer, after all, does not advocate a full retreat into discourse that modern Westerners would identify as religious, but in *Eclipse of Reason* maintains that the object of his faith is philosophy. I contend, then, that we must look outside Horkheimer's own writings for a way of doing philosophy that takes the figure of the prophet (as characterized in the Hebrew bible) as its model. In the modern West, one common assumption about the category of "religion" (and the objects proper to it) is that religion occupies a sphere independent of the rest of society. This figure of the Hebrew prophet, though, originated in a context in which the existence of a distinct category of "religion" that remains independent of the rest of society was not an operative assumption. In fact, this conception of religion as occupying a separate sphere would have struck the ancient Israelites as rather foreign. Since the figure of the Hebrew prophet arises from this context in which the binary construction of "religion" and "not religion" is absent, the Hebrew prophet perhaps offers a

model of discourse in which Horkheimer's faith in philosophy (when that faith in philosophy itself is likewise conceived of as rejecting the binary construction of the categories of "religion" and "not religion") can be realized.

In this regard we can look to Antonio Gramsci's (1999 [1929]) model of the organic intellectual, who originates from among the oppressed and marginalized classes. Although their discourse remains philosophical rather than theological, they nevertheless advocate for the interests of their particular class in their work. Gramsci notes that all intellectuals are products of a historically particular mode of production which reflect the interests of one class or another within that mode of production, thus he is interested in the development of intellectuals who reflect and advocate for working class interests. Situated in this tradition of the organic intellectual, Cornel West advocates for a philosophical approach he calls "prophetic pragmatism" (1989: 212), which frequently employs the rhetoric and symbolic systems of African American Christianity in service of what Clarence Sholé Johnson (2003) identifies as a thoroughly secular humanist ethical agenda.

In "The New Cultural Politics of Difference," West advocates for "creative responses to the precise circumstances of our present moment-especially those of marginalized First World agents who shun degraded self-representations" (1990: 93). In other words, West calls for creative and intellectual workers in Western contexts to attune themselves to mainstream or dominant political, creative, and cultural forces, for the purpose of "enabling subcultures of criticism." He rejects what he calls the "Go-It-Alone" model of intellectual life for oppressed and marginalized people, advocating instead that cultural workers in the industrialized Western world act as "critical organic catalysts" who "simultaneously position themselves within (or alongside) the mainstream while clearly aligned with groups who vow to keep alive potent traditions of critique and resistance" (1990: 108). By aligning themselves with those who resist the hegemony of what Horkheimer and Adorno (1988 [1944]: 120–67) call the culture industry, while still positioning themselves within it, West's new cultural workers are well-positioned to carry out the immanent, genealogical critique of Western societies' reason and concepts.

In addition to West, we may also include figures like Frederick Douglass, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Anthony B. Pinn to the list of thinkers whose work espouse a humanist ethical vision that whilst giving a voice to human suffering and demanding its alleviation, simultaneously affirms the motivational potential of symbol systems commonly identified as religious. It is, I suspect, no coincidence that the examples that come immediately to my mind are African American thinkers; in Gramsci's conception of the organic intellectual, after all, we should expect that the most powerful and persuasive voices that give voice to human suffering will be those that originate from among the marginalized and

oppressed peoples within a society. To the voices listed above we may add those of the poor, other ethnic and racial minorities, women, immigrants, Native Americans, LGBT persons, disabled persons, religious minorities, and others who likewise speak from social locations where they experience oppression and marginalization.

If we take figures like West and others who fit the mold of Gramsci's organic intellectual as instructive in the development of a prophetic philosophy, some notable challenges remain for Horkheimer. First, to the extent that such a movement attempts to borrow the prophetic form of the Jewish and Christian religions without thereby also affirming the factuality of their theological contents, there is a danger that such a project might repeat what Horkheimer takes to be the mistakes of liberal Christianity. Thus the realization of such a philosophical project would require Horkheimer's own ambivalence regarding the liberalization of religion to be resolved—perhaps via some self-critique by liberal Christians and liberal Christian institutions themselves. Second, attempting to re-embrace religion in Horkheimer's project invokes his distinction between good and bad religion (i.e., between resistance and accommodation), this prophetic philosophy risks merely reifying Christian categories as a stand in for "religion" simpliciter, thus undercutting the project's ability to speak compellingly to practitioners of religious traditions outside Western Christianity.

As Robert Orsi (1998) argues, the history of the study of religion, particularly in the United States, has been a history of attempts at surreptitiously elevating Christian (specifically, Protestant Christian) theological categories to universal status, as though those particular categories were applicable to and descriptive of all social configurations identified as "religions." Throughout the history of the academic study of religion in the United States, where said study emerged out of the confessional study and practice of Christian theology, there has historically been a temptation—often impossible to resist—to construct good or proper religion and to police the boundary erected between it and its simultaneously-constructed opposite, bad religion. In Orsi's view, then, "Before we practitioners of Religious Studies can introduce moral questions into our approach to other people's religious worlds, we must first excavate our hidden moral history. Otherwise, all that a revival of moral inquiry will be is the discovery, as if we had come upon something new, of our unacknowledged assumptions and prejudices as moral concerns" (1998: 202). Given, then, that Horkheimer's sharp dichotomy of good and bad religion has a history in the American academy that is not entirely innocent, we who seek to continue Horkheimer's project cannot be content to affirm that distinction as he formulates it, lest we fail to speak to the concerns of those (i.e., Islamic militants) whom we take to be our conversation partners, but rather merely elevate our own prejudices to a false status of disinterested, universal moral concerns.

Many readers of Horkheimer, including Boer (2011) and Rudolf Siebert (1977), have noted that sharp distinctions between good and bad religion permeate his thought; Siebert summarizes the distinction as being between those religious expressions that are progressive (good) and those that are reactionary (bad) (Siebert 1977: 52). This binary, though, merely repeats the mistakes that Orsi (1998) denounces as a reification of Christianity (and, more specifically, a particular expression of Christianity) that functions only to bolster the interests of those who appoint themselves as arbiters of what makes for "good" and "bad" religion. Most social phenomena colloquially identified as "religions," and their expressions, are far too multifaceted to be so easily labeled good or evil. I therefore contend that Horkheimer's "good"/"bad" binary threatens to undercut his project's constructive potential to move beyond the impasse in public discourse regarding Western responses to militant extremism. Here too, Cornel West's example in "The New Cultural Politics of Difference" is instructive: for West, remaining attuned to the best that mainstream culture has to offer (including the handful of traditions that constitute mainstream religious life) allows critical organic catalysts to use this selection as a vehicle for critique of that culture. Thus, in West's model, the critical organic catalyst must not rest content with a sharp distinction between the good religion of resistance and the bad religion of compromise. Surely religious institutions in the West, including those who identify with liberal versions of Christianity, have throughout history been guilty of compromise with oppressive forces. It would be a mistake, however, to make a leap from these historical facts to any conclusion that, in some sense, compromise essentially constitutes such institutions. Surely, as West (1990: 94) notes, the workers of the new cultural politics of difference must constantly navigate the tension between progressive resistance and co-optation. Nevertheless, *pace* Horkheimer, successfully navigating this tension requires a conception of the forces of resistance and co-optation in dynamic rather than static terms—that is, rather than being easily separated and differentiated, they constantly coexist within the same persons and within the same institutions.

And so we return to the challenge with which we began—that is, how to formulate a compelling nonviolent alternative to Al-Qaeda's and other Islamic extremist organizations' attempts to fill the global political vacuum with a violent resistance to instrumental rationality. In this regard, the refusal of the distinction between that which is "religion" and that which is "not religion" is apt: when we presume that there might be genuinely religious motivations that drive Islamic extremists to engage in violence, it remains entirely unclear what we might mean by "genuinely religious." Moreover, it is not merely the combination of the two terms whose content is questionable. Rather, the meaning of each of the two constituent terms, "genuinely" and "religious," is hardly obvious, and thus the descriptors are not particularly analytically useful. What, after all, should be

the critical scholar of religion's criterion for religious practitioners' "genuineness" in their religious practice?

Regarding the term "religious," then, its referent also remains unclear. There are, after all, thousands of social phenomena across the world that might be labeled "religious"; what particular features, though, are those who analyze Islamic extremism as a "religious" phenomenon, picking out with the use of that term? Rather than being a framework whereby one might explain Islamic extremism, talk about "religion" (particularly talk about "genuine," "authentic," or "real" religion) amounts to nothing more than a refusal of any explanation. Thus, an approach that dispenses altogether with distinctions between that which is "religious" and that which is not is a welcome corrective to those approaches that insist that the term "religion" tells us more about those to whom it is applied than it does about those who invoke and apply it.

As Christopher Brittain (2005: 157) observes, Horkheimer recognizes that the religions he primarily concerns himself with in his own writings (Judaism and Christianity) often share with Marxism a vision of a better life and a better world. Moreover, Horkheimer agrees with Marx's (2000 [1843]: 71) now-famous assertion that "the criticism of religion is the presupposition of all criticism." However as Brittain notes, unlike Marx, Horkheimer considers this criticism incomplete. I have suggested that at least one step toward the completion of that project is to reject the conception of religion as a *sui generis* phenomenon in favor of a conception on which those social formations we call "religious" are entirely continuous with the remainder of social life in all its ambivalence and ambiguity. Thus the sharp distinction between "religion" and "not religion" disappears—and, along with it, the unhelpful and overly simplistic distinction between "good" and "bad" religion that threatens to undermine Horkheimer's project of faith in philosophy before it is even off the ground.

Horkheimer's faith in philosophy—if we understand that faith as itself a refusal of the "religion"/"not religion" binary rather than as a return to religion—purports to address precisely the issues that also, at least in part, motivate Islamic militants. Moreover, the move to reincorporate language and symbolism typically associated with religion (specifically, the figure of the prophet in Judaism and Christianity) offers us some insight into how we might flesh out the details of that project of faith in philosophy. Even so, pointing us to the figure of the prophet still represents only a broad gesturing in the general direction of a fuller development of Horkheimer's proposal at the end of *Eclipse of Reason*, and does not yet rise to the level of a full articulation of what such a philosophical program would look like. Moreover, to the extent that the temptation simply to reify Christian religious concepts remains operative, there also remains a risk that such a project could fail in its attempts to engage militants and even nonviolent activists working out of other frameworks (e.g., for present purposes, most notably Islam). Nevertheless, while a robust, specific,

analytical account of Horkheimer's program of faith in philosophy has yet to be articulated, the examples listed above demonstrate that there are thinkers who have been working in the spirit of his proposal. Thus, by attending to and building on those figures' examples, we might move toward a response to militant extremism and an alternative to the hegemony of instrumental rationality that replaces it, not with more violent extremism, but with what the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1963: 771) calls "an extremis[m] for love."

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