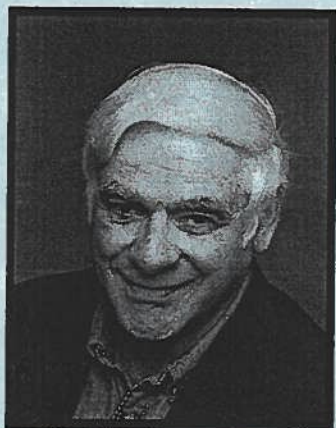


# GTU Distinguished Faculty Lecture 2003

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## **Dr. Lewis S. Mudge**

on "The Gift of Responsibility:  
Fostering Global Social Contracts"

presented by  
the Graduate Theological Union

**Wednesday, November 19 at 7 P.M.**

**Dinner Boardroom, Flora Lamson Hewlett Library  
2400 Ridge Rd., Berkeley**

**Following the lecture will be a reception  
and the GTU Faculty Publications Fair  
in the Dinner Boardroom.**



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Lewis Mudge is Robert Leighton Stuart Professor of  
Theology, Emeritus, at San Francisco Theological Semi-  
nary. The faculty respondent is Clare Fischer, Aurelia  
Henry Reinhardt Professor of Religion and Culture at  
Starr King School for the Ministry.

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## The Gift of Responsibility: Fostering Global Social Contracts

November 19, 2003

**Lewis S. Mudge**

*Emeritus Professor of Theology, San Francisco Theological Seminary*

My thanks to respondent Clare Fischer, and to others who participated in the discussion, for thoughts that have helped me say better what I want to say.

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### 1. Introduction



At the close of his book *Public Religions in the Modern World* the sociologist José Casanova makes the following extraordinary statement:

Religious traditions are now confronting the differentiated secular spheres, challenging them to face their own obscurantist, ideological and inauthentic claims. In many of these confrontations it is religion which, as often as not, appears to be on the side of human enlightenment.... It would be profoundly ironic if, after all the beatings it has received from modernity, religion could somehow unintentionally help modernity save itself<sup>1</sup>.

These words sum up a volume-length questioning of the once widespread consensus that in the modern world religious activities and beliefs will become ever more privatized, marginalized and publicly ineffective. On the contrary, Casanova shows that religious bodies have of late been playing major political and social roles. He cites a series of recent developments involving politically active Roman Catholicism in Spain, Poland, Brazil, and the United States, along with a newly potentiated American protestant evangelicalism<sup>2</sup>. Such groups, this sociologist argues, have not only been effective participants in debates over public issues. They have often found themselves on the side of values such as democracy and human rights in the face of a "modernity" increasingly given over to the destructive logics of rivalries for global dominance and the ideology of the global market. Religious bodies, Casanova says, have thereby turned out to be carriers of genuine "human enlightenment." Secular institutions, even those with roots in *the* Enlightenment, increasingly often have not.

But notice those words "ironic" and "unintentionally." If religious communities can in fact "help modernity save itself," it will probably not be because they have taken on this task as a self-conscious, thought-out responsibility. Rather, we infer, any secular "salvation" they help bring about will likely be a by-product of some other intention: competition for political advantage and/or cultural preference, institutional self preservation. The exception will be religions that have appropriated key aspects of the Enlightenment *critique* of religion. Casanova summons such traditions to respond to the Enlightenment's failure "to redeem its own promises" by bringing forward "enlightened" resources of their own<sup>3</sup>.

Whatever exactly Casanova intends by these provocative remarks, the present essay seeks to prod religious communities—especially the "religions of the book" but also others—into making the "saving" of modernity a conscious project. Along with violence, corruption, political decay and economic exploitation, modernity does have some features worth preserving. One could try to rescue at least the values of democracy, human rights, the rights of women, the positive discoveries of science, and much more. But there is a deeper reason for seeking modernity's "salvation." This is, after all, the age through which all humankind is now passing from its past to its future. For better or for worse, we cannot avoid it. If this "modern" global project were to collapse under its own self-contradictions—perhaps into a Hobbesian "war of all against all"—there might well be no human future, and hence, as Jonathan Schell has written, no more poems, no more symphonies, no more little children full of promise. And there could be no redeeming either of the biblical promise of a Holy City of God at history's close. In all these ways, but especially in the last-named sense, "saving modernity" can be seen not only as a needed human enterprise but also as a genuinely theological one.

### **a. A Proto-Braudelian Perspective?**

But ideas like these are very large in scope. Perhaps they are too large to be dealt with in the focused academic perspectives to which we are accustomed. Yet such broad thinking is not unknown to the academy. The French historian Fernand Braudel was known for his mastery of detail, yet he contributed two notions that help us grasp the meaning of large historical perspectives. The first is the idea of the historical phenomenon of "long duration," for example the course of "capitalism" from the 15th to the 18th century (the topic of one of Braudel's own books)<sup>4</sup>. The second is the notion of the "grand narrative" or *grand récit*, the fundamental "story" that the historian finds in these long sequences of events<sup>5</sup>. This may or may not be the story people of the times and places concerned sense that they are living out. In either case, the historian sees a multitude of details interacting in patterns whose meanings he or she seeks to discern, in order to find in them a persuasive, illuminating, narrative.

For religious communities to find a way to "help save modernity" would certainly launch the world on a most unexpected *grand récit*. The very idea invites us at least to sketch a plausible account of how such a thing could conceivably happen. For such a purpose, of course, the bulk of the evidence is not yet in. One is trying to extrapolate possibilities from present circumstances: a very risky proposition indeed. What one can conceive as possible at any moment of time may have little to do with what actually takes place. But one is better off with some sort of hypothesis—even one that needs to be constantly revised in the light of experience—than with no idea at all. Meanwhile, the proto-Braudelian character of such a project accounts for some of the characteristics of the ensuing argument. Many fields and lines of reasoning are here combined—religious studies, economics, ecumenism, philosophy, and more—just as they are in the actual unfolding of history. This in part explains my argument's inherent complexity. I am trying to synthesize a number of the factors that seem to support the response I will give to Casanova's challenge. This response, of course, may not in the end be at all what Casanova had in mind!

### **b. Totalization and Resistance**

The overriding reality that seems to face us today can be expressed as a contrast between the oppressive ("totalizing") consistency of what modernity stands for and the fragmentation of the forces that seek to resist these tendencies<sup>6</sup>. Let us look quickly at each.

On the one hand, one cannot but be aware of the terrifying comprehensiveness and coherence of what amount to ideologies and practices of irresponsibility on the global scale. The complex phenomena of "globalization"—economic, informational, educational and otherwise—despite the collateral goods they generate—give rise to visions of the meaning of human life in this world that countenance limitless and destructive expansion of economic activity tilted mainly, if not exclusively, toward the

interests of the powerful. The rationality of market mechanisms, mathematized into something called "rational choice theory," seems impervious to the spiritual needs of persons, not to speak of the values embedded in cultures. The ideologies connected with globalization may well turn out to be more destructive than the activities themselves, for they seem to ratify a diminishment of the possibilities of human life. But they fit together into an astonishingly consistent, if blinkered, understanding of what life is about<sup>7</sup>.

Not unconnected with these forces is a globalization of violence and counter-violence that has of late absorbed so much frantic energy from so many. Cultures and religious traditions are often distorted by those in positions of power to give symbolic cover to their predatory schemes, turning historic faiths toward patterns of fear and hatred toward those with other commitments. Both these globalizations, of commerce and of violence, thrive on tunnel vision. For persons caught up in such ideologies there often seems to be little else worth thinking about. They can be called irresponsible (not to speak of Casanova's words "obscurantist, ideological and inauthentic") both in their refusal of self-criticism and in their neglect of the broader consequences of what they do.

On the other hand, the potential cultural and religious resources for resisting such totalizing tendencies are seemingly scattered all over the map. Christians and Jews, reading with fresh interest the spate of new books on Islam, can only be struck by the radical pluralism and complexity of the present global religious situation. In a recent essay titled "Which Way to Mecca" Clifford Geertz writes:

...many of the large-scale concepts by means of which we [have] been accustomed to sorting out the [religious and cultural] world have begun to come apart. ... [They] have lost much of their edge and definition, and we are left to find our way through vast collections of strange and inconsonant particulars without much in the way of assistance from finely drawn, culturally ratified, natural kinds.<sup>8</sup>

One need only read all this as a mirror in which we see ourselves to realize that "Which Way to Mecca" is also a question for Jews and Christians. Which way to Jerusalem? Which way to Rome? Which way to Geneva, or Moscow, or Istanbul? The pluralism and conflict of interpretations of tradition, the variety of circumstances and historical narratives, and above all, perhaps the tendency—for Jews, Christian and Muslims alike—to ideologize and politicize religious faith, make this a dangerous moment in which some alternative way of seeing things is urgently needed. That confusion and ideologization rule, and that alternatives are at best minority positions in all three faiths, if not mere theoretical possibilities, should not deter the effort at least to think differently. There are those in each faith who do think differently. Is there any possibility that they can think together?

Is there a possibility, furthermore, that members of, or groups within, these religious communities and others can join hands with the enormous variety of other religious communities, social movements, secular non-governmental organizations, as well as

myriad other associations large and small, to mount resistance to modernity's ills? These groups do for the most part excellent work. There is no lack of awareness of the issues, but also little or no agreement about what resistance means, where it should be focused, or on what principles it should be based. This problem is endemic, if only because responsibility for resistance must, in the nature of the case, be multiculturally tuned, and not imposed on the many by some few who think they know best.

### **c. Taking Responsibility for Social Contracting**

Like Casanova, I think that it makes sense to "help modernity save itself" through forms of immanent criticism within our different cultures. Critics who stand outside the mainstream of modern cultures are nonetheless products of those cultures, and thus in a significant sense immanent critics themselves. Can modernity save itself by generating from within itself critics of its own coherence? The arguments that follow turn on two notions that I believe have inherent validity in a wide range of cultural situations even when invoked by prophetic minorities. These run through the exposition like guiding threads. The first is the idea of taking responsibility. The second is the notion of forming social contracts.

To take responsibility for something or someone is to pass over the threshold of ethical commitment with regard to that concern. In the present case it is to determine oneself to do something about the threats to human life that have arisen in from the characteristics of modernity. One may engage forever in moral argumentation without taking the step from argumentation to action. But, once the step is taken, one discovers that genuine responsibility-taking is not an autonomous achievement but rather the exercise of a spiritual gift mediated to us from beyond ourselves. This mediation takes place in several different ways: through discernment of the requirements of situations in which we quite simply find ourselves placed, through recognition of Others whose presence confronts us with obligatory demands, and through an unaccountable sense of having received our very being as responsible ones from a Source that seeks covenantal relations with us and our neighbors.

The second notion running through the argument is that of the just-mentioned covenant or contract as a possibility for human life. The way we live together, whether it be under domination or generously free, implies the existence of what Enlightenment philosophers called a "social contract." I have chosen this notion as a way of getting at the sense of paradigmatic human relationships societies are acting out by being ordered the way they are. It is particularly important today to extend this idea from nation-states to the global community. If it is taken for granted that global society is a place where we try to get the better of one another by any possible means, then we are living under one kind of implied social contract. If on the other hand our society assumes that we are fundamentally noble and generous and need to return to that condition, the implied social contract is something else. A covenant is only a kind of contract that engages our fundamental integrity to the depths of our beings, to violate which would mean a loss of personhood. It is this sort of depth relationship that our religious traditions are best

suited to foster, making it the presupposition of our downstream pacts and agreements.

Each of these notions will be elaborated in several different contexts as the argument proceeds. This paper contends that the religions of the book should recognize that they possess gifts of responsibility for fostering qualities of relationship among persons and social institutions that can help modernity save itself from its own contradictions. And can certain cultural institutions—religious communities in particular—find ways of helping all these counter-forces effectively to coalesce? Can religious groups—as I argue later—"lend" narratives to these forces that function as catalysts for their finding of their own narratives?

#### **d. Reinterpreting Religious Traditions**

It is indispensable for religious groups that want to play significant roles within this fascinating scene to realize that they must take responsibility for interpreting their traditions accordingly. Tradition is not and never has been a static reality, even for groups that claim it to be unchanging. Each age always receives and interprets tradition anew. Traditions can bring forth gifts of new possibilities, and that fact alone lays hermeneutical responsibility on each generation as it comes spiritually of age.

What does "of age" mean in this connection? Casanova remarks that the religious groups likely to be most helpful in the struggle for modernity's soul will be those which have internalized the main lines of Enlightenment criticism<sup>9</sup>. I take that, I think, in a way different from what Casanova intends. I take it as a gift to religious groups *from* modernity: the ability to grasp objectively who they are as both personal and institutional social actors within the dramas being played out around them. Hermeneutical responsibility today involves putting this kind of socially self-reflective capacity to work.

One of the things we see when we do this is that we have too often allowed ourselves to become instruments of ideological forces and hence legitimators of the violence—often inter-religious violence—planned and committed by political and economic adventurers of many stripes. Emancipation from this sort of ideological enslavement is indispensable preparation for the considering the arguments that follow.

I will argue for a practice of a "parallel hermeneutics" of traditions and situations to reach this end. Can the "religions of the book", in spite of all the misunderstandings and acts of violence that have roiled the relations among them, together find in their traditions and contemporary spiritual resources the means thus to be a "blessing" to humanity in this contentious age? That question stands over all the sons and daughters of Abraham and Sarah on the strength of Genesis 12:3. Through God's covenantal gift to this couple and their descendants, we are told, "all the families of the earth will be blessed" or, perhaps better, "bless themselves." On the face of it, one would think that Jews, Christians and Muslims, in their conflicts, are part of the bundle of problems besetting modernity rather than part of the answer. This essay argues that the opposite, given the hand of Providence with sufficient time, effort, and wit on our human part,

could turn out to be the case.

## 2. A Crisis in Contemporary Social Ethics

But, as things now stand, none of the three faiths in question is in a strong position to enter the sort of relationship I am calling for. Clearly there are individuals and associations in each community already thinking the same or analogous thoughts. But these represent decided minorities whose views are generally repudiated by the more numerous conservative leaders and followers. On these matters I can speak with knowledge only of my own Christian community. Here I think two things are true. First, Christians probably have explored the question of their moral stance in the world in a more self-conscious and organized way (i.e. with historicist, Troeltschian, perspectives) than members of any other faith. But, second, these progressive Christians are probably less ready for a proposal such as this one than they were fifteen, or fifty, years ago. Whether progressive members of the other two faiths would say comparable things I cannot at the moment tell.

### a. Ethics and Society in the Ecumenical Movement

The Christian "ecumenical movement," in particular, has probably sponsored the most significant and sustained probes into the sorts of questions this paper is raising. At least the question of this tradition's public moral stance in a global perspective (along with many other matters) has been wrestled with by leading scholars over a period of several generations. If a movement such as this has now reached an impasse over just these issues, it tells us something. I am leaving aside for the moment Christians who insist they find no difficulty at all. Large sectors of Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy and protestant evangelicalism seem to fall in the latter category. These Christians (of course not all of them) maintain largely traditional moral stances, and are not likely to be part of the dialogue I am urging in these pages. No, the problems I will sketch are felt precisely among Christians who might be expected to be the most receptive to an argument such as this one.

What is happening among ecumenically minded Christians that makes social ethical questions so difficult? In a word, a kind of "deconstruction" has entered the progressive ethicists' tent. All ethical questions have become specific and local. While the public world becomes ever more integrated around its systems of communication and exchange, the field of social ethics becomes increasingly fragmented to the point that few, if any, integrating ideas seem available for such thinkers to work with. If only because the different religious faiths, despite cultural differences, live in very much the same world, one can guess that Jewish and Muslim progressives already have, or soon will, experience the same deconstructive pressures.

It has not always been so. At least for Christians, living memory (or at least *my* rather long-term living memory) recalls a quite different situation in the years just after World War II. Ecumenical social thought in that period was self-confident, optimistic, and



based on principles thought to have broad cross-cultural application. No trace can be found in those mid-century documents of the critical self-consciousness and self-doubt we feel today. Today, at the start of the 21st Century, ecumenical social thought goes forward (if that is the word) as if in conscious reaction to all its earlier characteristics. Breadth of scope has been abandoned for focus on specific issues only. Rules and principles have been laid aside in favor of thinking rooted in local contexts and thought inapplicable beyond them. What was once a deductive enterprise from first principles to "middle axioms" to specific applications is now at best inductive, if not simply intuitive. Unreflective self-confidence has been replaced by nagging self-doubt<sup>10</sup>. No wonder the ethically energized legions that might have "helped modernity save itself" today appear so weak and fragmented in comparison to what they face today.

One reason for this fragmentation has been the failure thus far of the Christian church unity movement to bring us anything like coherence in its theological base. But what comes out most clearly is the fact that ecumenical social ethics in its heyday gathered around and gained confidence from two *grands récits* (whether properly Braudelian or not), narratives of human purpose and destiny that ran through the consciousness of people and shaped their initiatives and aspirations. First there was the post-World War II triumph of the righteous West, which led the churches to the theme of "responsible society" (roughly 1948-1968). The second was the global socialist movement on which rode liberation theology and the theme of "revolutionary solidarity" (roughly 1966-1991). But both these syntheses have by now lost their capacity to lend coherence and confidence to Christian or any other form of religious moral reflection. Furthermore, it is not clear that any new world movement, any new human passion, exists now to counter the global ideology of global profit and consumption combined with military domination that threatens to consume us. Some say that we are left now to synthesize any moral position we can out of purely religious resources.

#### **b. Multiple Premises for Social Action**

Much faith-based social action nevertheless continues. Indeed the sheer level of activity is probably increasing. But it is based on a multitude of diverse premises, theological and otherwise. What is it that we now think we are doing when we act out an "ecumenical social ethic?" Are we really doing one thing, or are we doing many, perhaps incompatible, things? For some, social activism is missiological: a response to God's mission to the human race. For others it is largely a matter of following an ideology shared with usually secular others whose objectives we think compatible with those of Christian faith. "Liberation theology" remains in many ways alive, but is now focused on the claims of specific communities that play out differently in different places. It is no longer coherent enough in its manifestations to offer dialogical space for global moral discourse. It is striking that we do not appear today to have even the minimum conditions for another "world conference on church and society." We would be hard put to know whom to invite. We would be deeply challenged to lay out an adequate agenda. We would be reluctant to plan such a thing for fear of being accused of one

sort or another of theological imperialism.

And what do we mean by "theology" in such a situation? Critics of progressive Christianity say that it is nothing but secular left-wing ideology combined with occasional biblical prooftexting, but not a coherent over-all vision. Maybe the latter is neither possible nor desirable, because it would tend to exclude all those who do not share it. On the other hand, many exclude themselves from support for the present stances because they do not share the implicit politics and do not see much, if any, connection with their own understandings of the faith. Some suspect that social passion is no more than a substitute for faith at most half-believed-in.

Hence a seeming impasse: on the right, conventionality and certainty; on the left, an ethic described by Heidi Hadsell as "somewhat experimental in terms of methodology, somewhat tentative in terms of moral content, and somewhat unstable in terms of conversation partners." Such an ethic is "not ready for public consumption."<sup>11</sup> It is at best thought through and practiced in many small groups prepared at most to function as leaven in the larger lump. As matters stand, Christians are in no position to offer leadership to other world religions in helping to "save modernity." Some new vision is needed. In such a situation it might seem presumptuous to claim to be within sight of yet another "Kehre", another "turn" to a new narrative: one marking the waning of deconstruction in ethics, one marking the beginning realization of what Robert Schreier calls "the new catholicity?"<sup>12</sup> Unquestionably such a new turn will not come from the minds of scholars alone, but from what is going on in the world. The new global moral insight will come over the horizon of history. The writer's task is to discern it, to articulate it, to suggest what might be its practical consequences.

### **3. The Market as Model for All of Life**

The world indeed has not stood still. While progressive religious ethicists struggle for conceptual traction, the dominant economic ideology of the West has become more expansionist and more culturally totalizing than ever before. I use the word "totalizing" in two senses. First, the notion of "the market" is now being used as a model for conceiving many human activities beyond the realm of economics as such: more and more human pursuits are being viewed primarily in marketing terms. And, second, single-minded concentration on success in the market is producing consequences that corrupt nearly everything they touch: from the environment to foreign policy to the arts and beyond.

#### **a. Life-Distorting Social Contracts**

The market model, in short, has moved ever closer to becoming our civilization's master category. It has moved, in fact, into the space of what social philosophers of the 17th and 18th centuries (e.g. Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Kant), as well as the contemporary writers John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas, called the "social contract," or

fundamental transactional *logic* underlying the life of some particular society. It has been the philosopher's way of laying out the implicit presuppositions of a people's life-together. Such typifications of human interaction nearly always take some sort of economic form. As David Hume said: "Your corn is ripe today; mine will be so tomorrow. 'Tis profitable for us both. that I shou'd labour with you today, and that you should aid me tomorrow.<sup>13</sup>" In short, it makes economic sense to adopt cooperative relationships. The philosopher looks at typical sets of such relationships—whether they involve trade, or fence-building, or honor among thieves—and imagines society itself as having originally been constituted on some such basis. Social contract theory is thus a kind of rationalization of social origins, replacing what primitive societies dealt with by having bards or wise men spin creation stories or foundation narratives.

The social contract, then, is a theoretical generalization about the nature of the social derived from the character of actual relational patterns in the society concerned. That is why I have said that when a particular economic ideology becomes so dominant that virtually all transactions are conceived in its terms, that ideology becomes the effective, even if unreflective, "social contract" at work in that situation. Only we are not so disposed these days to express this idea in the form of classical contract theory. We prefer mathematical formulas—in the manner of John Nash (he of the film "A Beautiful Mind") or Gary Becker, both winners of the Nobel Prize in Economics—that have the capacity to predict patterns of human behavior and to suggest fruitful strategies for profiting from knowledge of these patterns. When our interactive space is thus taken over by a logic that excludes all considerations but those of the market, we call it a form of "totalization."

So pervasive has this foundational social-contractual logic become in our time that criticism of it begins to be seen as irrational, as lying outside the boundaries of plausible discourse. We are told that "there is no alternative." The French scholar Pierre Bourdieu<sup>14</sup> has given us the term "neoliberalism<sup>15</sup>" for this notion. He stresses that it is not merely a set of economic institutions but an *ideological* position. Perhaps Bourdieu's picture is a little overdrawn: he is, after all, a critic of the system he describes. But there is much truth in his analysis. He sees the market as having become so dominant a model as to be largely beyond question. This is the case not only for power elites that benefit from its assumptions but for those injured by those assumptions as well. Here is the "truth" that Western elites now hold "to be self-evident," as if it were pure rationality in practice.

Here is the social result of "rational choice theory" overstepping its boundaries and proposing to mathematize all human life by turning it into a series of cost-benefit calculations in which self-interest and profit maximization are assumed to be the only really rational (as opposed to unrealistically idealistic) human motivations. What we have here is in effect a substitute social contract, refined to the point at which it is capable—through the application of complex formulas—of predicting human actions and reactions. The Chicago economist Gary Becker indeed won the Nobel Prize in Economics for a book extending a form of rational choice theory to the understanding of all human behavior<sup>16</sup>.

Yet the life-world colonizing (Habermas's word) character of market-oriented reasoning, with all its far-reaching consequences, is often systematically and cleverly hidden. This ideology has the means, largely through capture of the media, of making itself seem quite simply true, thereby forcing the progressive disappearance of "autonomous universes of cultural production." Independent publishers and filmmakers, independent media outlets, and other cultural institutions are forced to make their way with ever-diminishing public support. The ideologists of this movement have also succeeded in coopting many conservative religious groups, with varying political results. The "neoliberal" ideology, as Bourdieu sees it, eventually takes over all that lies in its way, but slyly does so in an imperceptible manner, "like continental drift." Paul Treanor, a Bourdieu interpreter, has summed all this up in three short aphorisms:

Act in conformity with market forces.

Within this limit, act also to maximize the opportunity for others to conform to the market forces generated by your action.

Hold no other goals<sup>17</sup>.

Another, less aphoristic, definition, again by Treanor, fills in details and adds subtlety:

Neoliberalism is a philosophy in which the existence and operation of a market are valued in themselves, separately from any previous relationship with the production of goods and services, and without any attempt to justify them in terms of their effect on the production of goods and services, and where the operation of a market or market-like structure is seen as an ethic in itself, capable of acting as a guide for all human action, and substituting for all previously held ethical beliefs<sup>18</sup>.

#### **b. Tracking Far-Reaching Consequences**

One consequence of such a substitution is the erosion of trust among individuals and communities, or, better said, the substitution of calculation for communion. This concern has a long history in the West, and no doubt elsewhere. Clearly the question has ultimately to do with the character of the social contracts by which we live. It probes the question of the social glue (or "social capital") underlying the exchange relations that constitute much of society as we know it. The social philosopher Adam Seligman <sup>19</sup> has sought to assess the impact of this loss of trust on the moral fabric of public or civic space. His conclusions are dire. If we cannot trust the intrinsic veracity of what people do and say, having to assume that they are constantly calculating how to take advantage of us, it follows that reason and communication in the larger sense are in jeopardy.

...we may well query if the loss or transformation of trust as a mechanism of social interaction (public and private both) is not part of a broader transformation which



will see a transforation of the very terms of rationality, perhaps in the direction of a *wiederbezauberte* world. Whether, as I suspect, an enchanted world is also a more brutal and Hobbesian one is an empirical question, the answer to which may not be long in coming<sup>20</sup>.

A second consequence of the neoliberal ideology very likely heads us in the same direction. It fosters a mentality, with market mechanisms to match, that require constant economic growth even to produce social stability. Think of the current Deutschebank ad: "Aiming higher, pushing harder." We have persuaded ourselves that stock prices and other evaluations can only be sustained if there is constant expansion of economic activity and of profits. Any calendar quarter in which a company does not do better than in the preceding one is likely to see that corporation's value reduced by the financial analysts. This fact builds a constant expansionist compulsion into the system that the earth cannot indefinitely sustain. This compulsion also fuels dishonesty and deception. If the firm has not in fact done better, the temptation is strong to indulge in accounting practices that hide this fact. And so we have our Enrons and Arthur Andersens and all the rest<sup>21</sup>. Simple logic tells us that such an expansionary process cannot go on indefinitely.

The ultimately unsustainable pursuit of constant gain obviously tempts many to "get theirs" while they can, and to protect themselves as far as possible from the larger social consequences of their having done so. Consider the editorial comment by Brent Staples that appeared in the *New York Times* for November 10, 2003. It pictures the state of California as a place where the rich are simply "seceding" from the larger community. Picturing a future for the state in terms of the film "Blade Runner," "wealthy and middle-class Californians have increasingly withdrawn into gated communities that thrive while the older, poorer, counties they have fled struggle along on a diminished tax base. The people in the new, homogeneous communities tend to be extreme localists who drop out of the broader civic life. When they do engage in statewide politics they tend to do it with ballot initiatives that slash tax revenues, hamstringing the legislature and generally cut the civic ties that bind citizens in one place to those at the far end of the state."

And such an ideology, if it takes hold, generates still further consequences that, for lack of space, can only be mentioned here. Plainly, for example, it affects the way we handle environmental questions and the way we manage foreign policy. It impacts both our conception and our delivery of health care<sup>22</sup> and retirement benefits. It both generates the economic capacity to *do* all kinds of things that human beings have never been able to do before, and it also provides the ideational context (again the market) in which we *decide* what it is we will do with our industrial and technological capacities. It betrays us into violent solutions to problems that might better be dealt with in other ways. And, most important of all, it leaves large numbers of people across the globe out of this decision-making process altogether.

Much more could be added. But one consequence could be the most important of all. Because this is an ideology, it overwhelms broader, more inclusive, kinds of social-

contractual reasoning. It blinds social actors to the significance of what they are doing. It imposes moral blinkers on us such that we cannot see the consequences or, if we see them, we cannot take them seriously as factors in our decision-making. We cannot see them as our responsibility. Such ideological blindness and irresponsibility in turn distort, or even invalidate, the effective social contract. Yet our actions continue to have consequences. They impact our lives and the lives of future generations. That is why I have described this way of life, particularly where the use of power is concerned, as *irresponsible* in the deepest sense.

#### 4. Assessing the Resistance: A New *Grand Récit*?

If there *is* a grand narrative being played out among us now it is most obviously the threateningly coherent process just described. Fernand Braudel, if he were alive today, might well wish to add a second volume to his *Civilization and Capitalism* recounting such recent developments. My question, however is whether a counter-narrative is now also afoot that could, with the help of religious communities, gain a coherence it does not now possess. What might that look like? I do not believe that we are about to repeat the socialist experiment. Furthermore I do not argue in what follows for killing off entrepreneurial activity as such pursued within proper limits. I do not even advocate resistance to entrepreneurship as a system for the production of wealth, so long as that wealth properly benefits the community at large. I am speaking of social-contractual resistance to a ideology that now makes it plausible that entrepreneurship should overwhelm all other sectors of human activity. I mean resistance to a monomaniacal pursuit of profit as the only truly absorbing human goal.

##### a. Beyond Revolutionary Socialism

No economist or politician, or course, would regard the above as the description of an adequate social program. It is much too sketchy for that. But it is clear that a generation ago progressive religious ethicists could avail themselves of a ready-made counter narrative: that of revolutionary socialism in its various manifestations. I have little doubt that socialist thinking is still alive in some quarters. It has only gone underground and it could eventually resurface in new forms. But the resistance movement for which I am calling will need to be something more persuasive than a socialist revival. It will need to be something more insightful than an alternative economic system, which would undoubtedly become prey to many of the same difficulties as our present one. It will need to be resistance in the name of a different kind of social contract, drawing upon religious covenant traditions and projecting a deeper vision of the purpose of human life.

Are religious communities in a position to foster something like this? The ideologically driven and life-threatening realities needing to be resisted are such that conventional moral reflection cannot adequately deal with them. They cry out for a new kind of ethics. Speaking for Christians, Konrad Raiser argued a few years ago that churches over the centuries have typically seen their moral task as one of undergirding

and supporting established moral orders. But now such established orders are not only shaken by events—by the rotting away of their credibility both East and West—they were never, even at their best, capable of responding to the new kinds of questions that beset humankind, especially when we consider the viability of a human future on this planet. Therefore, Raiser argued, churches (and no doubt other religious communities) must get together to think out an "ecumenical ethic" built on scriptural and theological traditions acting together to yield a new ethic for humankind in a new age.

I have already alluded to the seeming decline of "liberation theology" as the possible integrating factor for such a project. Never much enamored of the record of state socialist regimes and always able to learn from Marxism while seldom slavishly tied to it, liberation thought still has power for many. But it has gone out of fashion as an intellectual pursuit for the younger generation of scholars. It has begun to be replaced by an array of distinct projects that well remember the original liberationist inspiration but do not wish to perpetuate it as such. I am thinking, for example, of the various feminist, womanist and mujerista movements, Black, Hispanic and Asian theologies, Southern Hemisphere thinking in general, local/contextual theologies of all kinds, and much more besides. To call these enterprises continuingly liberationist in tendency is not inaccurate. But at the same time this term misses the sheer variety of what is now happening. We see the rise of myriad dissenting movements independent of any single theological inspiration. Sometimes they seem to be without any coherent intellectual roots at all.

I think that we must say today that neither the intellectual resources nor the institutional base exists now for a purely Christian "ecumenical" project for a global ethic. The churches, even if they were united in a triumphant ecumenical movement—which they are not—do not have the means (or, I think, the will) to do such a thing alone. They too are fragmented both within themselves and among themselves<sup>23</sup>. And they are even less prepared for the needed dialogue among the different religious communities.

With such observations many have virtually despaired over the possibility of finding a way forward. I do not despair. But religious bodies will not find the needed resources merely in dialogue among themselves. They will need to do it by using their resources to discern the disparate and scattered signs of a new *grand récit* in the world, and by giving that movement language and a name that it does not now have. Despite all the contraindications—which should sober any of us tempted by romantic expectations—I do think that such a thing is possible, but not by churches or other religious communities acting alone.

#### **b. Resistance Movements of Many Shapes and Sizes**

Resistance movements of all kinds already exist. So many and so familiar to us are they that there is no need to make a list. They differ enormously in type: from multiple organizations that promote the equality, the rights, and the contributions of women, to

political lobbies to issue-oriented NGOs to idealistic yet effective organizations like Oxfam and Doctors Without Borders, and Bread for the World, to the groups that mount demonstrations at global economic and political summits, to groups like Greenpeace that interrupt nuclear tests. Some arise to meet special moments of opportunity, like Jubilee 2000. Some of these groups are global in scope, and some are local. Some are pressure groups and some are counter-cultural islands or alternative communities.

By no means are all resisters and their organizations outside the worlds of government and business. Some are inside these domains, and try to resist totalizing ideologies from within. Nor are all these persons and initiatives purely secular in motivation. A significant number of individual resisters and resistance organizations are related to religious communities. While most religious bodies as such are not yet mobilized to oppose political and economic totalization, there are resistance groups inside religious bodies as well as religiously unaffiliated groups some of whose leaders and members are religiously motivated.

One of the best current examples of such resistance to the *status quo* is the "Geneva Accord" project in which two persons, former government ministers of the State of Israel and the Palestinian Authority respectively, were brought together by an assistant professor at the University of Geneva (who describes himself as a "pure Calvinist") to draft—purely on a private basis—a peace plan for these two nations, confronting the seeming inertia of the official authorities on both sides. At the time of this writing the "Accord" has attracted widespread international publicity, the condemnation of Ariel Sharon, and the strong support of various existing organizations such as *Tikkun* magazine. It could be that this "Geneva Accord" will pick up steam, and have an impact comparable to that of "Jubilee 2000" on the international debt crisis. Here could be real evidence of the emergence of a counter-*récit*, or narrative running against the grain of the dominant totalizing powers.

Looking at this whole spectrum of initiatives, we find a very wide range of views of the world and working methods. And, in view of the interconnected character of the results of our ideological irresponsibilities, it is remarkable how many of these groups focus very sharply on single issues. Perhaps that is the way it must be. It is as if the complexities of our world were (understandably) seen as too numerous to face all at once and a decision were made to pick off issues one by one. Or perhaps, for different people, different causes are seen as iconic, or representative of the whole.

Somewhere recently I saw a statistic indicating that the number of such resistance groups has more than doubled in the past ten years. They would certainly add up to enough to be regarded as a significant force, even a new *grand récit*, if there were enough coherence of vision and purpose among them. But, unfortunately, these efforts are very scattered and have surprisingly little communication among themselves. This despite efforts to overcome the fragmentation on the part of umbrella groups such as the World Social Forum (which next meets in Mumbai, the former Bombay, in January, 2004).



I do not think that we can easily generalize about what is going on here. The multiplication of special-purpose initiative and organizations *suggests* an increased presence in our culture of selfless altruism toward the claims of today's marginalized folk and of future generations: something that could be called a spiritual posture of sorts. But this is by no means true in every case. Much resistance to the ideologies of domination is based on the simple judgment that present policies are unsustainable or that they do not agree with one's political preferences. Democratic faith is the basis of such activity as often as is religious faith. Sometimes the two are combined.

But in some cases—we cannot easily know which—there is the chance for transcending both types of faith in their conventional forms. Such transcendence takes the form of willingness to put oneself on the line in solidarity with Others whom one may not even know: those already marginalized or sidelined by ideologies of domination or potential members of future generations whose very existence is at stake. Here something more universally "ethical" and ultimately religious is at work. Can we identify what this religio/ethical factor is and then ask whether it could offer the basis for a *linkage* between such initiatives and movements articulable through the narratives of religious communities?

## 5. Taking Responsibility: A Spiritual Discipline?

The starting point for such an inquiry could well be the observation that, in the midst of the irresponsibility of neoliberal economics, these groups and individuals "take responsibility" beyond routine for resisting economic totalization and for mitigating its human consequences. What does "taking responsibility" like this mean in the larger scheme of things? Could there be a clue here to the nature of these groups' common "spirituality"?

The meaning of responsibility-taking is of course highly context-dependent. Different cultures see it in different ways. The Japanese, I am told, equate it with "taking blame" for mistakes or for things that have gone wrong, seeing little that is positive in the idea. I, reflecting my own culture, see "responsibility" as the indispensable accompaniment of "rights," and indeed as a threshold of ethical consciousness as such. For me to "take responsibility" means that I acknowledge, and in fact undertake, a personal obligation to be engaged in a significant matter with the fullness of my personal integrity<sup>24</sup>. But for purposes of our present discussion I want to focus on only one dimension of such engagement, and to make only one distinction among all the distinctions that could be made: that between routine responsibility in established structures (with their ideologies, whether blinkered or otherwise) and "taking responsibility" to meet new needs for which there are few if any precedents to guide us. It seems clear that the resistance movements I have been describing, and the individuals animating them, "take" responsibility beyond routine in matters for which they "have" little or no responsibility in the ordinary course of events.

### a. Contemporary Philosophical Visions

This distinction comes out in different ways in the work of certain contemporary philosophers. I will choose two for comment. Hans Jonas is not speaking directly of entrepreneurial totalization but of the fateful capacities it places in our hands. In *The Imperative of Responsibility*<sup>25</sup> Jonas argues that the coming of modern technology (never the strong point in liberation analysis), including nuclear technology, has utterly changed the fundamental premises of moral argument. Where before it was assumed that the nature of human beings, with their capacities and possibilities, was largely determined in a static set of circumstances, and hence that human responsibility was quite narrowly circumscribed, these simple premises no longer hold. With the development of radically new human capacities—the abilities to communicate, to destroy—the nature of human action as such has changed. And this change calls for a different kind of ethics. It is not just that we have new subject-matter for moral rumination. Rather, as Jonas says, "the qualitatively novel nature of certain of our actions has opened up a whole new dimension of ethical relevance for which there is no precedent in the standards and canons of traditional ethics."<sup>26</sup> There are now questions facing us for which "nobody is responsible," in the sense that nobody has these things directly in their job descriptions. Ethics is now forced to look beyond the direct, immediate dealings between people and consider actions that have an unprecedented reach into the future. A new sort of moral responsibility, with no less than humanity's fate for its concern, must, in Jonas's view, be moved to center stage.

A more recent work moves in the same direction. In his symposium titled *Taking Responsibility: Comparative Perspectives*<sup>27</sup>, Winston Davis makes a crucial distinction between two kinds or levels of responsibility that seem congruent with what we are saying here. The first he calls *simple responsibility*, meaning the sum total of our conventional, settled, duties. At this level responsible people are dependable, reliable, trustworthy and prudent. But there is another level: responsibility that is *complex* or *reflexive*. This is responsibility corresponding more to what Jonas is calling for: responsibility in novel or unprecedented circumstances such as those faced by the human race today. This sort of responsibility is "a move forward into the unknown" in which we seek, but may not find, guiding principles that make any sense in advance. Yet we know that the human race is threatened by its own injustices, its own despoiling of the environment, and much else, and we must take responsibility for fashioning responses to such threats, including taking responsibility for the possibility that we may be mistaken. This is something quite different from bearing routine sorts of responsibility in stable, known, circumstances.

Other philosophers are now chiming in. Jacques Derrida, for example, declares that "there is no responsibility without a dissident and inventive rupture with respect to tradition, authority, orthodoxy, rule, or doctrine."<sup>28</sup> Comparably, Thomas Keenan says that "the only responsibility worthy of the name comes with the removal of grounds, the withdrawal of the rules or the knowledge on which we might rely....It is when we do not know exactly what we should do...and when we have nowhere else to turn...that we encounter something like responsibility."<sup>29</sup>

One honors the intention of such radical philosophical statements. But one also sees

the dangers of living by them too exclusively. There are hints here of solitary presumption—particularly in the last-mentioned quotation with its seeming claim to existential courage—that runs the risk of spiritual distortion. Taking responsibility, even in the midst of radical uncertainty, may easily become an expression of pride, or just plain dogged obsession with an idea. One brings off the revolution and then one becomes a tyrant. The responsible ones can become certain that their vision is superior to all others and zealously defend the power they have achieved. Indeed the suicide bomber, by his or her own lights, almost perfectly fits the profile just sketched. A certain interpretation of a religious tradition, fueled by desperation and the belief that in *this* way one can participate in a world-historical grand narrative called Jihad, adds up to violent death for innocent people. Christians and Jews have not been exempt from Jihad-like responsibility-taking either. Think of the Crusades, or of Ariel Sharon's current strategies for protecting the integrity and security of the State of Israel.

#### **b. Responsibility to Promises: The Element of the Gift**

Not all responsibility-taking, then, is salutary for the human community.

Our responsibility-takers can be like true prophets, or they can be like false ones. We have offered a description of the role, but not yet a criterion for judging how authentically it is played out. Everything depends on the kind of sense made by the narrative that shapes the action. And by "sense" here I mean primarily the kind of immediate or ultimate promise the narrative contains. Taking responsibility means being responsible to *some* kind of promise, and this in three senses. One must be responsible to the promise implied in one's own life as a conscious actor (integrity in identity). One must be responsible to the promises to Others implied in one's actions (solidarity in relationships). And one must be responsible to the ultimate ends of the human community implied by one's philosophical or religious tradition (the dimension of faith). Absent these dimensions of promise-keeping, taking responsibility can become false prophecy. With these dimensions, responsibility-taking has in it an element of the transcendent that can only be described in the vocabulary of the gift.

The presence of this sense of giftedness is a matter of testimony rather than of argument. Finding one's life defined in terms of responsibility to promises in oneself, to others, and to an ultimate end is not the result of reasoning but of discovering, seemingly unaccountably, that it is so. I believe that this is what Calvin meant by making public responsibility a fruit of sanctification, in turn a work of the Spirit. It is sheer gift to certain people, not something to be explained conceptually. The citizens (some Calvinist, some not) of the village of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon in southern France who systematically rescued Jews from the Gestapo between 1942 and 1945, when asked why they put themselves in such danger, could only reply that this needed no explanation. Is this not what one does? Well, no. It is not what most people do. It is a remarkable gift, seemingly given only to some. The word used in the village for these gifted neighbors was apt: "les responsables."<sup>30</sup>

Such a sense of gift is really only articulable in religious narratives, particularly those of covenants given and received. These covenants turn on both divine and human promises and the responsibility both parties have for keeping them. Such relationships are plain in the religious narratives of Judaism and Christianity. Are they also present in Islam? Hannah Arendt gives us a perspective for reflection on this point presumably compatible with all three traditions. In *The Human Condition*, she offers a brief reading of the Genesis Abraham narratives. Arendt's point has to do with what she calls "the power of stabilization inherent in the faculty of making promises." Of this power she writes,

...we may see its discoverer in Abraham, the man from Ur, whose whole story, as the Bible tells it, shows such a passionate drive toward making covenants that it is as though he departed from his country for no other reason than to try out the power of mutual promise in the wilderness of the world, until God himself made a covenant with him<sup>31</sup>.

Has Abraham *first* discovered a covenanting mission for himself and has God *then* chosen this covenant-maker as God's instrument for reknitting the fabric of human society as a whole? I confess that I do not find the matter put exactly this way in Genesis. But perhaps we can say that God's covenantal intention is indeed prior, but that Abraham must live into its meaning before the intention can be fully articulated as God's. Is this what Arendt has uncovered?

I am not sure. Arendt does not draw out the point. But surely in this passage human beings are not the only promise-makers. One has to deal here not only with responsibility to the promises we make, but with responsibility to a promise that is inherent in the creation of a universe that is such as to produce a race of conscious historical actors capable of "taking responsibility:" that is, such as to engender the very possibility of making promises and keeping them. We are self-conscious agents operating in the context of the evolutionary unfolding of the universe. What does that mean? It means that we are given responsibility within that evolutionary unfolding to make the meaning of the process itself articulate: to put words to it, to act it out. We do that by taking on shared responsibilities toward the victims of totalization (solidarity) and by taking on responsibilities toward the future of the human community itself (promise-keeping).

For Arendt both these responsibilities involve wrestling with the very truths about us that projects of ideological totalization express so well: namely the "darkness of the human heart," and "the basic unreliability of men who never can guarantee today who they will be tomorrow, and...the impossibility of foretelling the consequences of an act within a community of equals where everybody has the same capacity to act."<sup>32</sup> Today, "rational choice theory," as the logical-mathematical instrument of totalization, can be seen precisely as the attempt to rationalize, to foreclose, the uncertainties of human behavior that go with freedom. Promising in freedom is "the only alternative to a mastery which relies on domination of oneself and rule over others."<sup>33</sup> How are we to escape from such domination and open ourselves to the power of the promise? Arendt invokes



the principle of "natality," by which she means bringing to pass the unprecedented thing in human affairs, the birth of the child who makes all things new. In this present essay, natality means bringing to birth a new narrative of human life-together.

This is the point at which religious communities, the keepers of such narratives and symbols, may be able to make their contribution. If made sufficiently aware of the possibility, they could find new ways of gathering many kinds of responsibility-taking—as phenomena of resistance to totalization—into contemporary narratives that give such initiatives deeper significance. Indeed religious leaders may be able to covenant among themselves, speaking so far as possible too for the vast numbers of peoples and cultures they represent, to invest the work of those who "take responsibility" with larger meaning. This would mean to discern the gifts of the Spirit that are present in these movements, even to find there a world-historical significance that would justify seeing them as attempts to "save modernity," a prospective, even Braudelien, *grand récit*.

## 6. Practicing Parallel Hermeneutics

One way for Jews, Christians and Muslims to begin to make such a contribution could be to covenant together to support a program of "parallel hermeneutics." Resistance narratives of "taking responsibility" could here be correlated with scriptural narratives of responsibility as gift. I speak of "parallel" interpretative processes because different faith communities will do this in different ways. But an initial commitment could be made to try out such a process and to compare results. One might choose a passage that has parallels in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, seek some converging definition of the situation addressed, and set in motion a comparative study of the hermeneutical principles and situated practices of exegesis used in the three religious traditions, and their many sub-communities, to address some particular human situation calling for the exercise of responsibility beyond routine. Certain comparable procedures and results might (or might not) then emerge. The results might generate an instructive conversation among the hermeneuts even if they did not agree with one another. Perhaps these results might converge *enough* to permit a certain sharing of daringly (i.e. Davis's "complex" or "reflexive") responsible practices in the public world. Perhaps they might not. But still we would learn from one another. And in agreeing to do something like this on a regular basis, religious communities would be beginning to weave new narratives into the array of social contracts by which we live.

The inter-religious dimension of this proposal reminds me of Paul Ricoeur's second project in *The Symbolism of Evil*: that of adopting "provisionally the motivations and intentions of the believing soul.<sup>34</sup>" Such a move can be described, as I have done elsewhere<sup>35</sup>, as a form of mutually proffered "moral hospitality," an opportunity to share the essential "moves" of another's tradition of faith: to share these moves in neutral terms open to anyone, without the need to become a "believer" within that tradition, or a member of that ethnic group. This exposition implies that, when traditioned communities meet to pursue agreements over practical issues, it is possible for representatives of each imaginatively to "get inside" the thought of the other, and indeed for each tradition to make moves that invite such reciprocal understanding.

### a. "Nativity:" The Abraham and Sarah Narrative

Many different scriptural passages might lend themselves to such an experiment. My own suggestion could be the story of the gift of children to Abraham and Sarah, children in whom they rejoice but for whom they must be responsible for the very continuation of the covenantal gift, with parallel Q'uranic and other Islamic traditional materials. Here Arendt's category of "natality," the new thing, clearly comes into play. The fulcrum passage in the Jewish and Christian scriptures (I have not yet canvassed the Islamic possibilities) is Genesis 12:1-3:

Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land I will show you, And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing....and by you all the families of the earth will bless themselves<sup>36</sup>.

I think it is not too far-fetched to say that Abraham is here summoned from what I have called routine responsibility to responsibility on the frontier of the unprecedented. Abraham believes God's promise of a covenantal and universal blessing, and, not only is this "reckoned unto him as righteousness" (Genesis 15:6, with many echos in the New Testament, especially Peter's sermon in Acts 3, and Galatians 3, where Paul recalls the promise to Abraham as the basis of his own ministry to the gentiles and his understanding of salvation by grace alone received in faith), but in fact the Patriarch obediently sets forth in order to fulfill it. What is his and Sarah's new responsibility? First of all to see to it that there *are* future generations, meaning that his responsibility with Sarah—child rearing—is the most primordial one: that of parenting toward a righteous future.

It is precisely in this image that Hans Jonas locates the root meaning of the new responsibility needed in all human cultures. It is the fulfillment of a known role, yes, but in this new form it also has much of risk and uncertainty in it, in short responsibility with reference to much that one cannot control, responsibility to help create conditions under which the same uncertain-future responsibility can be fulfilled by the next generation and the next. Such responsibility cannot be exercised without sufficiently stable institutions in each generation, but those institutions are not enough to show us what responsibility truly is.

Abraham and Sarah are doing more than conceiving, birthing and bringing up children. Abraham is also seeking to help create a network of covenants *outside* his tribal family. One can conjecture that he is trying to lay the foundations for a larger secure world, lacking which his children and their children's children will always be threatened. The word "blessing," or *berakah* in Hebrew, is an exceptionally rich evocation of the kind of renewed society these passages have in view. The word may be related to the verb "to create," *bara*, in which case the Abrahamic "blessing" could be understood as a new creation in the life of "all the families of the earth." Family life is not transcended by this new blessing, but it is transformed<sup>37</sup>.

### **b. The "Yahwist Revolution"**

Founded here is nothing less than a community of resistance to the royal military ideologies and economic systems of the ancient world (Sumeria, Babylon, Egypt, Rome). Abraham and Sarah have launched what Edward F. Campbell calls "the Yahwist revolution," embodying a new way of living together and a new way of articulating social-contractual rules. Torah is such a contract, constantly interpreted and reinterpreted in the Deuteronomic code, prophetic writings, and wisdom literature. These interpreters—the prophets especially—are the "complex" or "reflexive" responsibility-takers of their day. Dissatisfied with the "simple" responsibilities then offered persons with their education and connections, they identify issues not yet on official radars, speak out about them, and gather followers into movements of resistance *within* Israel, just as Israel itself is a movement of resistance to the assumptions that prevail in the empires around it.

Needless to say, gathering religious communities around a covenant of parallel hermeneutical responsibility toward texts like these—let alone a risky wrestling against totalizing ideologies on the basis of these texts—will not be easy to achieve. Such moves will involve precisely the kind of reinterpretation of traditions illustrated in Arendt's treatment of Abraham. Such rethinking is even less likely to happen in an age such as our own in which religious communities have been turning inward, claiming to know for certain the finality of the truths they teach. But Jews, Christians, Muslims and others need to take seriously the kind of footprint in the world they leave by such reactionary moves. Faith traditions have responded to new circumstances in the past, and they will again. There is a chance now to make a positive difference to the world—even to "help save modernity"—if only the opportunity can be adequately grasped in practice and articulated for what it is. Our age presents religious bodies with a gift of responsibility to do both. That would be a stupendous gift of responsible behavior to the human race.

## **7. Covenanting to Foster Just Social Contracts**

It follows that the religious communities, whose narratives can serve such a deepening and integrating function for "the responsible ones," themselves have a responsibility to use these resources to discern and articulate what is going on at a spiritual level in the various resistance movements of our time. Perhaps religious communities can both discern here a new *grand récit* in the making and foster its coming to public expression on history's stage. But I do not think that the new Braudelian narrative we are searching for can just be stated in so many words before it begins to be acted out in fact. I speak of "fostering" or "nurturing" (as did Abraham and Sarah) a new reality in the world capable of embodying such a narrative. I see religious communities, covenanting in parallel practices of situated hermeneutics, able to "read" the resistance movements using the criteria I have proposed: responsibility to the gift given us by the very presence of the Other, responsibility to the gift of transcendent promise, responsibility to the gift of "natality," the advent of the new. How and where

are such gifts present in the resistance movements of our time?

#### **a. From Responsibility Narratives to Resonant Resistance Strategies**

Grafting stories of worldly responsibility-taking into covenantal narratives of blessing should help us discern the presence of such gifts. Quite simply we should ask: Is it plausible to see this or that resistance effort as a long-term extrapolation of the Abraham and Sarah story? If so, we should be able to detect a certain *resonance* among different stories that seem to belong to the implications of that narrative. In turn, that should in turn help resistance movements find a badly-needed coherence. Such a reading-together of diverse meanings should help the latter to set in motion a process of renewing and extending our basic understandings of common life so as to limit the power over us now held by totalizing ideologies. I stress the word "process." If this happens at all it will happen slowly, and in many different ways. Diverse yet coordinated approaches and much persistence are of the essence of adequate strategies of resistance.

Pursued persistently enough, such resistance strategies should bring about changes in the implicit social contracts by which we live. The phenomenon of "totalization" of consciousness around entrepreneurship and profit described earlier in this paper is in fact simply a narrowing of the scope of our effective social understandings. It is one thing to resist this impoverishment of life by taking responsibility on the social frontiers. It is another to wrestle with some of the central symbols of economic rationalization in our society, to take on the dominance of "rational choice theory," (whether expressed in mathematical symbols or just competitively acted out) in the self-understandings with which most people work most of the time.

Put this another way. The challenge facing us is to surround (or infiltrate) our imperial economic institutions with spheres of value that will neutralize these institutions' totalizing character, leaving the field free for useful economic practices, including entrepreneurial ones, so long as they are pursued for inclusively human purposes. Given the nature of human nature, of course, ideologies of unlimited acquisition and domination will probably never completely disappear. But their power can be restrained by stringent regulation maintained by popular will supported by alert religious communities. This will be hard enough to accomplish within the borders of nation states. But the even more pressing problem is to do it on a global scale, where there is at present even less effective regulation of economic activity that systematically excludes so many human beings from participating in its fruits.

In the end, such implicit contracts speak not only to managing the clash of opinions in the political process, but to the way that process itself is understood. The ideologies of domination and acquisition will not disappear, but they need to be limited, and their institutions regulated, by basic assumptions about fundamental social values and the ways societies work. This larger, more generous, "social contract" needs to grow in importance over against the powers of those who (in Habermas's term) seek to



"colonize" society for an ideology of purely rational choice in human relationships.

### **b. Generating New Social Models**

Clearly, if we want to dislodge such ideologies of totalization from their dominating roles in our lives we must challenge the sufficiency of these ideologies' basic assumptions about human relationships in the public world. Today's social contract theorists, such as John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas, do this by proposing alternative social models: models *for* the way we should relate to one another rather than simply models *of* the way we actually do relate. But mere advocacy of one or another such theory—liberalism, communitarianism, libertarianism, or otherwise—will not be enough. Much as we have learned from Rawls's *Theory of Justice* and from Habermas's *Theory of Communicative Action*, the real need is to bring the insights of the "responsible ones" into our underlying social codes, our assumptions about the deep contexts of our public life-together. Both Rawls and Habermas in fact give us versions of social contract theory, which I want to employ, without undue obeisance to either scholar, as a guide to a program of action for religious communities.

But my preferred description of such a project would consist not of an academically conceived theory of justice reached under conditions of idealized rationality (i.e. all interests represented behind Rawls's "veil of ignorance" by morally perfected versions of themselves), but rather of a real-life "overlap" of the claims of many "reasonable comprehensive doctrines." For Rawls, this notion of an "overlap" of doctrines supplements and supports his hypothetical notion of contracting "behind the veil of ignorance." I prefer to think of the "overlap," independently of the hypothetical social contract behind the veil, as a sphere of actual social contracting among value-laden communities. I think of the formation of such a public "overlap" of visions of life as a very down-to-earth political process in which many different cultures try to reach ways of living together that untidily embody practical compromises among values.

This is not the same thing as trying to transfer the assumptions of private life into the public arena. Reinhold Niebuhr warned us about that two generations ago<sup>38</sup>. Rather it is the attempt to foster changes in the character of myriad public relationships that constitute a society. We can help change the things on the basis of which philosophers build their social models. Actual contracts can begin to include considerations that reflect the public interest rather than only the interests of the contracting parties. Most of all today we can begin to build contractual, or perhaps covenantal, relationships between different cultural and religious communities representing visions of life that can be woven directly or indirectly into the public sphere.

But, when all is said and done, much if not all of what I recommend could be done by secular agencies. Are not religious moral arguments too often addressed mainly to private issues, just as Niebuhr said? Do religious communities really have a public role to play? It is obvious that religious communities represent a wide range of the cultures and interests that need to be involved in such covenanting, but *how* do they represent

them? First, if they have been listening, religious bodies have begun to have more than the usual sense of the new forms of ethical consciousness our age demands, possessing, as they do, traditions capable of resonating with such requirements. And, second, it is therefore possible that such representation will be more effectively "enlightened" than more purely interest-based advocacy, say, by trade unions. Here I find a conceivable substantiation of Casanova's claim to this effect. Religious groups may clothe the interests and ambitions of their peoples with a kind of critical-cultural legitimacy instead of the usual arbitrary claims to turf. They may thereby present their peoples' claims in what Ronald Dworkin calls their "best light."

This observation connects with an often-forgotten aspect of John Rawls's version of the social contract. In arriving at the sheaf of disinterested agreements constituting the so-called "original position" the direct pressing of conflicting interest claims is disallowed. The actors behind the "veil of ignorance" represent what these claims would be like if they were articulated at their moral best, that is, without being self-serving. It would be naive to suppose that having religious communities, as presenters of group claims, could actually reproduce such an admittedly idealized situation. Yet religious communities could help member groups present their claims in a manner more enlightened by knowledge of dimensions of justice beyond those invoked in their own cases. Could something like this be what Casanova meant by saying that, in comparison with secularism's "obscurantist, ideological, and inauthentic claims...it is religion which, as often as not, appears to be on the side of human enlightenment"<sup>39</sup>? The contracting or covenanting process through which religious communities help to "save modernity" generates a new kind of social space, a place for new kinds of spiritual-cultural resonance, a place in which a genuinely unprecedented reaching out not only to *the* Other but to all Others may come to pass. Thus the kind of social contracting that begins with the practice of a "parallel hermeneutics" of traditions continues into the actual practice of public affairs.

### c. Maximal Moral Identities and Focused Common Agreements

A helpful model of such contracting—whether hermeneutical or political or somehow both—can be found in the writings of Michael Walzer, above all in the small volume *Thick and Thin*<sup>40</sup>. Walzer's vision sees "maximal" moral identities, precisely such as those of religious or other specific cultural groups, as primary in the constituting of the larger society. Holders of "thick" moral codes interact with one another so as to produce "thin" agreements for specific circumstances representing society as a whole. These "thin" public agreements form the cores of the social contracts among "thick" traditions that I have in mind. There is no appeal here in Walzer to common "liberal" theory (e.g. that of Rawls or Habermas) of what "the" social contract *ought* to be like. Rather Walzer describes a process of dialogue by which one group appeals to the experiences or sympathies of the other, thereby building responsible trust between them. As Mark Douglas has written, "So understood, one group's appeal to another group's moral sense is not an act of derivation, but one of imagination."<sup>41</sup>

Presumably a succession of many such at-first-minimal agreements gradually produces a public political tradition, that in time grows "thick" in its own right, generating institutions, laws, customs, public culture, in short, conditions of trust, all still based on the many maximalist cultures of their origin. In sum, for Walzer, thickness interacts with thickness (tribe meets tribe) and works out limited practical agreements which both express mutual obligations and expectations and face common threats. Such pacts may help generate the social capital needed to deal politically with questions related to the future of humanity as such, not just the survival of particular groups in competition with one another<sup>42</sup>.

Social contracts in this perspective need to evolve from being mere hypothetical constructs by political philosophers to becoming self-conscious, explicit and enforceable agreements, particularly in the international realm beyond the reach of nation-based regulatory agencies. Societies today are too fragmented, too fraught with conflict, to be plausibly explained as the result of an agreement among typical social actors—say land-owners—at some primordial time. Principles for particular kinds of relationships need to be written down, and they need to reflect our grappling with the unprecedented issues our "responsible ones" are bringing to our attention. The United Nations Charter is an example of an international social contract drawn up to meet the circumstances of 1945. So is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Kyoto Protocol and the Earth Charter, the one governmental and the other not, are likewise contracts drawn up to address another set of circumstances, and so on. If we need to reknit society itself at both the national and international levels to resist totalizing economic ideologies of every kind, this is best done by negotiating at the most fundamental possible level a whole network of agreements, rethinking both the design and the destination of a global "ship of state."<sup>43</sup>

Insights such as these prod us to revise our effective social contracts so that the now dominant totalizing ideological trends are no longer supported, no longer taken for granted. Groups—including those that count as part of the "resistance"—that merely pursue lobbying strategies, each for its own specific goals, tend to leave the underlying trends unchanged even if they get their favorite bills passed. What counts is covenanting or contracting between significant groups to pursue a succession of such moves over time. This generally happens best when the insights of the out-ahead responsibility-takers are mediated—often by religious bodies—into the mainstream political discussion.

Perhaps there is need to make an agreement over land-use, water rights, inter-group marriage, or some other vital interest. The resulting arrangement—perhaps a treaty or legal precedent—will be very specific (Walzer will call it "thin") in comparison with the cultures on either side of the agreement. But it will need to draw, at least indirectly, on those factors in the cultures of the parties concerned that offer promise that the terms are understood and that the bargain will be kept. Each side finds in the other sufficient grounds for expecting support of the common agreement. Each discovers elements within its own culture that offer analogies for comprehending the terms of the treaty and reasons for observing it. Each ideally finds parables of its own "truth" in the other's

songs and stories. Covenant-breaking is then seen by both to violate who they *are*, to undermine their very identities. It is deeply *irresponsible* behavior.

I suggest that such elements of social contract, in their original "thin" forms, function subsequently as "armatures" on which thicker cultural flesh may form. The analogy from sculpture seems to me apt: you build up the human shape in layers upon the thin, minimal framework. If you live for a while with an agreement (say, over land, or water use) you begin to begin to supplement it with other sorts of relationships. At the very least, the agreement needs to be commonly interpreted, founding a shared legal culture. Trust vindicated by responsible behavior at one point spawns trust at other points. (If we cannot covenant responsibly about land or water, we may not trust one another over anything else, as Middle Eastern politics have made clear.)

Indeed, I believe that this is most often the way a common culture of trust begins to emerge out of cultural pluralism. Around each formal or informal pact, a new common culture extending to other matters arises. To the extent that the core agreement fosters some form of life-together, analogous stories may come to be shared. The fact that a dominating culture is likely itself the product of many previous accords between disparate groups does not change the basic equation. If new groups are encouraged to join, there is still the need for covenantal acts of mutual imagination. But then, of course, disparities of power need to be recognized and taken into account. Each side needs to find reasons for taking the risky responsibility of reaching out to establish such relationships in the culture of the other (at least as manifest in the negotiation if not through deeper knowledge) for trust that the agreement is fair and will be kept<sup>44</sup>.

The elements in diverse narrative and wisdom traditions most regulative of the character of the agreements people can justly enter alongside others are no doubt those concerning the very meanings of obligation and responsibility in the cultures concerned<sup>45</sup>. If an agreement is largely built on reciprocal cultural commitments engaging values such as these, deeply articulated within the sacred stories of the parties to the understanding, we may well call it a "covenant." If, on the other hand, the agreement only represents those reciprocal interests defined within the agreement itself enforced by sanctions defined in some existing legal tradition, it may be termed a "contract." Most "thin" agreements between "thick" traditions of life have elements of each in varying proportions and combinations. If, for example, respect for public law is a value represented in each contending group's internal traditions, there will likely be both covenantal (Durkheim's "pre-contractual"?) and properly contractual aspects to any agreement between them.

One can see such processes extending beyond particular nations to include the relations among peoples, or even among "civilizations" in Huntington's sense of the word. The specific issues that need agreements with both covenantal and contractual elements are obvious enough: human rights, environmental stability, the peaceful resolution of conflicts. Already we can see a certain culture (for example, the culture of the "UN system" in which both governments and non-governmental organizations interact in commonly understood ways) growing along the armatures of such

international contracts and treaties as we now have. We can understand why breaking such agreements or withdrawing from them can be so damaging to ourselves and to the sense of the human we share with others<sup>46</sup>.

The point of such examples—and of many more that could be adduced—is that, while the proposal offered in this paper may seem vast, it is no more than a rationale for what has already begun to happen and needs to happen much more. Elements of social contracting mediate the gift of responsibility most often today in small-scale relationships over specific, limited, issues. Such instances need to be joined together in a variegated patchwork which can in time make a difference. A perspective, however theoretical, on what this all means can help.

### 8. Coda: A Sense of Place

I think we have now explored the implications of José Casanova's words quoted at the beginning of this essay and have carried the argument some distance beyond them. The gifted exercise of responsibility for a contracting or covenanting process through which religious communities help to "save modernity" generates a new kind of social space, a place for new kinds of spiritual-cultural resonance, a place in which a genuinely unprecedented reaching out not only to *the* Other but to all Others may come to pass. Perhaps we sit in such a place tonight. One does not want to say too much. It is important not to yield to overly romantic expectations. But the Graduate Theological Union, at its best, has to do with the sorts of questions I have been raising in this paper. The inclination to such discourse is inscribed in our "genetic code." This is a place where we might experiment with a "parallel hermeneutics" of sacred texts in relation to human situations. Whether an opening to otherness in this parallel-hermeneutical way, or in some other manner, can generate the space of Plato's and Derrida's *Khora* (roughly, "that which gives place"), the space of the "trace" (Lévinas) of the *wholly* Other, the space for some incipiently messianic visitation, remains for our further reflection<sup>47</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 234.

<sup>2</sup> Strangely, Casanova makes no mention of comparable public roles assumed by protestant bodies in the former East Germany and in South Africa. (See John de Gruchy, *Christianity and Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). Such data would have bolstered his already strong argument.

<sup>3</sup> Casanova, *Public Religions*, 233.

<sup>4</sup> Fernand Braudel, *Dynamics of Capitalism* (Paris: Arthaud, 1985).



<sup>5</sup> Both notions figure centrally in the work for which Braudel is best known, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*.

<sup>6</sup> I see the various forms of "postmodernism" not as part of the resistance but as a series of strategies for escape, for opting out of the struggle for humanization in our time. More about this on another occasion!

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, the work of Pierre Bourdieu, of the College de France, on "neo-liberalism" as a political and economic ideology that drives the global activities of the powerful global interests of our time.

<sup>8</sup> Clifford Geertz, "Which Way to Mecca? Part II" *The New York Review of Books*, July 3, 2003, 36.

<sup>9</sup> Of Enlightenment criticism as applied to religion Casanova writes, "...only a religion which has incorporated as its own the central aspects of the Enlightenment critique of religion is in a position today to play a positive role in furthering processes of practical rationalization." (Casanova, *Public Religions* 233).

<sup>10</sup> In offering these generalizations I am drawing on an unpublished conference paper by Heidi Hadsell, "Possibilities for an Ecumenical Social Ethics."

<sup>11</sup> Hadsell, "Possibilities," 6

<sup>12</sup> Robert J. Schreiter, *The New Catholicity: Theology Between the Global and the Local* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997).

<sup>13</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book III, Part II, Section 4, 86, as quoted in Adam Seligman, *The Idea of Civil Society* (New York, The Free Press, 1992), 40.

<sup>14</sup> Pierre Bourdieu is a professor of the College de France and the author of books such as *The Field of Cultural Production*, *Homo Academicus*, *Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, *Language and Symbolic Power*, and *The Logic of Practice*.

<sup>15</sup> The term "neoliberalism" in this sense is virtually unheard of in North America and, if uttered here, is likely to be misunderstood as some sort of new Rawlsianism. The minute one travels to Western Europe, or to Latin America, however, one hears the term being used, as Bourdieu does, to mean the dominance of the "market" model for all human interaction.

<sup>16</sup> See Gary Becker, *The Economic Approach to Human Behavior* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976). A useful brief discussion of Becker can be found in Larry Rasmussen *Moral Fragments and Moral Community* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 49f. As Rasmussen says, Becker is "arguing against Adam Smith's refusal to extend the logic of self-interest into noneconomic territory, together with Smith's corollary conviction that different spheres require different moralities... In this scheme individuals are all "utility maximizers" who operate from a relatively stable set of personal preferences... Quite apart from markets, then, there is a mental process of market behavior and logic that supplies all the guidance needed for moral and other considerations necessary to the thousands of decisions we make." One may add, however, that some forms of rational choice theory, particularly

in the work of John Nash, stress the advantage-maximizing properties of market cooperation. This does not, however, reduce the primacy of self-interest in the equation. Cooperation here is not altruism. It is a self-interest strategy in itself.

<sup>17</sup> This trenchant summary is the work of Paul Treanor in his article "Neoliberalism: Origins, Theory, Definition," [on the web](#).

<sup>18</sup> Treanor, "Neoliberalism," 15.

<sup>19</sup> See Adam Seligman, *The Idea of Civil Society* (New York: The Free Press, 1992), and *The Problem of Trust* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

<sup>20</sup> Seligman, *Trust*, 175.

<sup>21</sup> I am indebted to Professor Austin Hoggatt of the University of California at Berkeley for making these connections clear to me.

<sup>22</sup> I cannot resist a very recent example in which "the bottom line" question apparently delayed the synthesis and testing of a drug for clearing clogged arteries known for years as potentially very promising because the substance was thought to be unpatentable and hence not potentially economically profitable. A new form of the drug *is* patentable, and hence we are *now* to have clinical trials and potential benefits. But why was this question not on anyone's agenda before now? Because a totalizing economic ideology linked to power simply blocked those who were in a position to do something about it from taking the question seriously. How many more potentially life-saving but unpatentable drugs are out there?

<sup>23</sup> Not least in this equation is the further fragmentation being brought about by the now-global controversy over gay leadership. I write these words at 4 p.m EST on Sunday, November 2, 2003, as the consecration liturgy for Bishop Gene Robinson gets under way in New Hampshire. This is an event that I celebrate. Yet it may prove to cast a very long shadow indeed over the future of world Christianity and over the capacity of the churches to mount anything like a coherent ethic for the human household.

<sup>24</sup> Two books among many deserve to be singled out as basic to defining "responsibility" within a Christian context. H. Richard Niebuhr's *The Responsible Self* (New York: Scribners, 1956), and William Schweiker's *Responsibility and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). I have learned much from each, but my argument is largely independent of these sources.

<sup>25</sup> Hans Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

<sup>26</sup> Jonas, *Responsibility*, 1.

<sup>27</sup> Winston Davis, *Taking Responsibility: Comparative Perspectives* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2002).

<sup>28</sup> Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 27, as quoted in Davis, ed., *Taking Responsibility*, 282.

<sup>29</sup> Thomas Keenan, *Fables of Responsibility: Aberrations and Predicaments in Ethics and Politics* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997) 1-2, quoted in Davis, *Taking Responsibility*, 282.

<sup>30</sup> On the village of Le Chambon sur Lignon and what happened there see Philip Hallie, *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979).

<sup>31</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 219.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 219.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 220.

<sup>34</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 19. Ricoeur goes on to say that the philosopher, *qua* philosopher "does not 'feel' these motivations and intentions in their first naivete, he 'refeels' them in a neutralized mode."

<sup>35</sup> See Lewis S. Mudge, "Moral Hospitality for Public Reasoners," in *Rethinking the Beloved Community: Ecclesiology, Hermeneutics, Social Theory*, (Lanham, MD: University Press of America and Geneva, WCC Publications, 2001), 275ff.

<sup>37</sup> I have omitted the words "I will bless those who bless you, and those who curse you I will curse" not only because I find them difficult but because there is evidence that the Hebrew redactors of Genesis found them so too. The summons to Abram is recalled on four other occasions in the Book of Genesis and in all four of these passages the words in question are left out.

<sup>37</sup> Could it be significant that the preferred translation "bless themselves," taking in Genesis 12:3b reflexively, parallels Casanova's notion of religious communities' "helping modernity save itself"? In both cases the point is that those "blessed" or "saved" are not brought some foreign product they do not already have, but rather that they are empowered to bring their own resources into a prevenient covenant of promise.

<sup>38</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (New York: Scribners, 1934).

<sup>39</sup> Casanova, *Public Religions*, 234.

<sup>40</sup> Michael Walzer, *Thick and Thin: Moral Argument at Home and Abroad* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994).

<sup>41</sup> Words of Mark Douglas from *Thinking Again About the Reformed Tradition and Public Life*, drafted by Mark Douglas, Lewis Mudge and James Watkins on behalf of the Consultation on Public Leadership group representing Presbyterian Church-Related Seminaries, October 10, 2001. This report suggests that Walzer's position has some interesting implications. I follow Douglas in drawing out two of them. First, if Walzer is understood to mean that thin moral propositions are persuasive—and therefore useful—only *because* they arise out of thick ones, "it follows that only those accounts that are sufficiently thick to cope with the moral complexity of the world—that is to say, quite thick accounts indeed—can give birth to helpful thin accounts." The thick moral accounts supplied by specific cultural groups thus deserve a place in public discourse: at least in discourse about the thin

agreements based imaginatively upon them. "...it follows," Douglas continues, "that the range of arguments that may be admitted into public conversation is considerably larger than the classic liberal tradition has allowed."

<sup>42</sup> Is Walzer, like Lévinas, here offering us insights from his own Jewish tradition in a neutral philosophical form, thereby inviting us to accept that tradition's "moral hospitality" without incurring specific religious commitments? One might conjecture so. Walzer is now at work on a multi-volume edition of the political and social wisdom of Judaism which will offer readers—Jewish and non-Jewish, religious and non-religious—access to this store of wisdom.

<sup>43</sup> See Walzer's use of the term "ship of state" in his masterly study *The Revolution of the Saints* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), 171-183. In contrast to the metaphor of "body politic," which implies an organic community for which change can only mean disease or decay, the term "ship of state" emerging in the late Cromwellian period, implies something consciously put together (as by craftspersons in a shipyard) and consciously sailed to a chosen destination by a crew that has willingly "signed on" to the enterprise. The new kind of "social contract" theory works with metaphors of the latter type.

<sup>44</sup> Narratives constitutive of long-established and dominant communities (the Horatio Alger myth, for example) will often valorize certain sorts of economic behavior, which may or may not be in the interest of the weaker parties.

<sup>45</sup> Much valuable information on the way different cultures understand the notions of responsibility and obligation can be found in Davis, *Taking Responsibility*.

<sup>46</sup> Numerous instances of such covenanting and contracting can be named. One that I find particularly fascinating because the partners differ greatly in the amount of power they possess, is the formation of the Nisga'a treaty between the Government of Canada and the "first nations" citizens of the Canadian Northwest (unparalleled by any such pact between Native Americans and the government of the United States). Even understandings underlying "affirmative action" legislation bear some of these characteristics.

<sup>47</sup> See John Caputo's expositions of Derrida's difficult but evocative word in *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion Without Religion* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), 35-38, 58-59, 167-169, *et passim*.