

ABSTRACT

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OBSOLESCENCE: JOSEPH RATZINGER
INTERPRETED THROUGH THE
COMMUNITARIAN CRITIQUE

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This dissertation explores four events in which Joseph Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI) attempts to address the modern and post-modern worlds. I demonstrate that his treatments of the relationship between reason and revelation, the Enlightenment's legacy, universal values, identity, and pluralism are engaged with a similar set of concepts addressed in the communitarian critique's initial reaction to the notion of the original position advanced in John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* and the libertarian spirit of Robert Nozick's *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*. I posit that at the heart of this critique, as well as in Ratzinger's works analyzed here, is the concept of liberal entitlement as generated from Locke and other social contractors, and that bound up with this are a challenge against philosophic obsolescence and the absences of humility and obligation. It is through these three themes—humility, obligation, and obsolescence—that Ratzinger's political teaching and his own communitarian thought emerge in his writings. Particular attention is paid to the communitarian critique's discussion of the narrative

method and the importance of identity, as they offer potential solutions for Ratzinger's desire for creating a non-coercive sense of civic obligation through a salient European identity and correcting the breakdown of common moral reference points in the West. This study ultimately explores where these select works by Ratzinger fit within this dialogue, and where they do not, as well as how they are situated within "garden variety" communitarianism of political theory and the Catholic Church's anti-liberal history. In doing so, Ratzinger's own communitarian thought takes shape.

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COMMUNITARIAN CRITIQUE

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Dedication

For Jasmine, Chloe, and Dane.

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Table of Contents

Dedication	ii
Acknowledgments.....	iii
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Joseph Ratzinger Interpreted through the Communitarian Critique	1
Selecting and Defining the Communitarian Critique.....	7
The Events: Criteria for Inclusion.....	9
Approach, Organization, and Synopses	15
Impact and Contribution	19
Chapter 2: The Communitarian Baseline: Critiquing the Liberal Self	22
Introduction.....	22
Communitarian Critique Overview.....	22
Reacting to Rawls and Nozick.....	25
Chapter Organization	30
The Basic Arguments.....	30
MacIntyre: Unity, Narrative, and Moral Disorder	30
Sandel: Reflection, Identity, and Language.....	32
Taylor: Primacy of Rights, Potential and Obligations, and Human Insufficiency ...	33
Walzer: Particularism, Self-Respect, and Distribution of Social Goods	36
Communitarian Concepts for Dialogue	37
Human Nature, Freedom, and Potential.....	37
Challenge to Autonomy	42
Primacy of History, Particularism, and Anti-Hypotheticals	47
The Power of Narrative and Language	49
Critical Vision of the Enlightenment	52
Responsibilities and Obligations.....	55
Application of the Six Principles	57
Chapter 3: Faith, Reason, and Law in the Habermas Encounter	59
Introduction.....	59
Humility in Universalism vs. Particularism, First Principles, and Internal Deliberation.....	59
Context of the Encounter	63
Challenges and Chapter Organization	65
Fides et Ratio: A Predecessor’s View on Truth, Pluralism, and Inculturation.....	68
Ratzinger’s Previous Works on Faith and Reason.....	72
Defining Reason in Previous Works.....	74
Defining Faith in Previous Works	77
Jürgen Habermas’s Munich Essay: “Pre-political Foundations of the Democratic Constitutional State”	80
Habermas on Catholicism.....	81
Habermas on Shaping Solidarity	82
Habermas’s Munich Rationalism.....	83

Joseph Ratzinger’s Munich Essay: “That Which Holds the World Together: The Pre-Political Moral Foundations of a Free State”	85
Importance of the Origins of Law	87
Terrorism and Religious Fundamentalism: When Reason Becomes Will.....	91
Ratzinger’s New Rationalism?	92
Chapter 4: Social Solidarity, Identity, and the Challenge of Pluralism in the Pera	
Exchange.....	96
Introduction.....	96
Obligation through Identity and Sacred Common Denominators	96
Ratzinger vs. Pera	100
Controlling Cyclical Development	103
Chapter Organization and Document Selection.....	104
Pera’s Initial Lecture: “Relativism, Christianity, and the West” (May 12, 2004)	106
Western Paralysis.....	106
Pera and Meta-Criteria.....	109
Relativism, Political Malaise, and Democracy	111
Ratzinger’s Initial Address: “The Spiritual Roots of Europe” (May 13, 2004).....	114
The Sacred	114
European Shifts and the Modern Era	115
Healing Cultural Malaise	119
Reason and Social Solidarity	120
Reconciling European Identity with Multiculturalism	122
Pera’s Response to Ratzinger.....	125
Ratzinger’s Response to Pera.....	129
Christian Consensus: America vs. Europe.....	130
When Secularists Live with Believers	136
The Unpersuasive Salesman: Christianity	137
Rationalism Resurfaced	138
Missing Pieces	140
Chapter 5: Modernity, Enlightenment, and Familiar Social Glue	143
Introduction.....	143
Recapping the Events: Preparations for Countering Obsolescence.....	143
Chapter Organization and Progression	146
Crisis of Cultures Address (April 1, 2005)	146
Reconciliation	146
A Brief Detour: Defining Culture and Inculturation.....	148
A New Moralism, European Foundations, and Scientific Uniformity	151
Resuscitating God, Again	152
The Enlightenment: Criticism and a Reinterpretation	155
Ratzinger’s Solution: A New Social Glue—Christianity as Logos	159
Regensburg Lecture (September 12, 2006): “Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections”	162
Hellenized Christianity	162
Violence as Irrational Behavior	166
God = Logos = Reason [or God as Reason/Logos]	169
Three Stages of De-Hellenization.....	172

Reconnecting with Modernity.....	174
Recreational Pragmatism?	176
The Communitarian Connection.....	180
The Poet and the Philosopher: The Narrative Solution	180
Hellenization and Narrative	183
Chapter 6: Conclusion.....	186
Introduction.....	186
Macro-Theme Assessment: Finding Humility, Obligation, and Obsolescence	187
Communitarian Diagnosis: Alignments and Deviations.....	190
Liberal-Conservative Communitarianism.....	190
MacIntyre: Narrative Discourse, Common Language, and Virtue Development ..	192
Taylor: Fraternity and Cultivation	194
Sandel: Identity Adviser	195
Walzer: The Changing Nature and Definitions of Power and Labor.....	199
Comparing Ratzinger with General Communitarianism	204
Garden Variety Anti-Liberalism	204
The Common Good through Encyclicals.....	207
St. Thomas and the Common Good.....	210
Final Thoughts	213
Glossary	219
Bibliography	220

Chapter 1: Introduction

Joseph Ratzinger Interpreted through the Communitarian Critique

Political philosophy aims to move political thought from the base, and often petty, realm of opinion to the elusive kingdoms of wisdom and truth. Throughout its history, political philosophy has sought to discover a better rationalism to fulfill this transcendence, often leaving its predecessors in a cheap obsolescence when one era takes on the task of evolving into a new paradigm. The Enlightenment's break with the classical and medieval eras—and later, by way of inspiration, John Rawls's concept of the original position and his ode to deontological liberalism—sought to elevate human judgment to an objective and less cruel plateau, yet what resulted was a disposition that made the act of judgment easier and, unfortunately, at times arbitrary since the common criteria for judgment disappeared. Authors belonging to the communitarian critique¹ of Rawls argue that the original position he posits underestimates the value of identity and social attachments and neglects to understand the importance of such criteria as common moral language and cultural narratives that establish one's identity and ability to make

¹ The phrase “communitarian critique” can be found in Robert B. Thigpen and Lyle A. Downing's article, “Liberalism and the Communitarian Critique,” in the *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 31, No. 3, (Aug. 1987): 637–655. My usage of the phrase deviates in two ways: 1) their article covers Alasdair MacIntyre, Michael Sandel, Michael Walzer, and Benjamin Barber, leaving out Charles Taylor from their research; and 2) John Rawls as the communitarian target is included, but Robert Nozick, who Walzer is replying to in *Spheres of Justice* and Taylor addresses in “Atomism,” is absent. “Communitarian critique” is preferred since it describes an era of writing, rather than application of the term as a label to the writers themselves. Lastly, it should also be noted that Walzer himself used the phrase in his article, “The Communitarian Critique of Liberalism,” in *Political Theory*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (Feb. 1990): 6–23. He mentions Sandel and MacIntyre in his article, but not Taylor.

decisions in accordance with a set of principles of justice. Some religious-minded thinkers outside of the field of political philosophy believe that scripture can provide these criteria; however, interpretations can vary and have the potential to lead to a religious fundamentalism that even the faithful find questionable. Joseph Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI) offers a unique Roman Catholic perspective on this issue since his academic career and administrative positions within the Church straddled both the religious and political worlds, revealing an author working to reconcile many of the same topics at the core of the communitarian critique, such as the limits of self-autonomy, the Enlightenment's role in moral breakdown, civic obligations, the primacy of history, humility, and the power of narrative and language as these topics relate to identity and how to persuade citizens to act on non-binding obligations without coercive measures. These themes take form in Ratzinger's writing as: the Enlightenment and ensuing modern rationalism that led to relativism; how the Church ought to handle pluralism in relation to narrative identity and social solidarity; a civilization's *sense of the sacred* to discover generational connections and to navigate the timeless issue of universalism versus particularism; inculturation and Hellenized Christianity; and the reconciliation of faith and reason, which brings to light internal deliberation and the origins of first principles.

The communitarian critique in political philosophy is a window into a time in the late twentieth century that represents an initial response to Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* (1971) as well as the libertarian spirit of Robert Nozick's *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (1974). This was not only a critical moment for the field of political theory, but also for the challenges of a rapidly globalizing and highly pluralistic world. Four representative texts of this initial reaction include Michael Sandel's *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*

(1982), Michael Walzer's *Spheres of Justice* (1983), Charles Taylor's "Atomism" essay (1979), and Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* (1981). In this research project, I argue that some of the seasoned writings of Ratzinger can be viewed within this same reaction to Rawls's *Theory* and Nozick's *Anarchy*. The social thought of the Roman Catholic Church finds a welcome home in communitarianism due to the Church's emphasis on the need to balance human rights with responsibilities and obligations, as well as the institution's long tradition of anti-liberal sentiments and promotion of the common good. Communitarian theory is to a degree anti-liberal theory, so the pairing of Ratzinger is not a stretch if it can be found that his reasons—and one would expect they comport with the Church's general anti-liberal output as much as it is possible considering that the institution has changed over time—are the same as those in the communitarian critique. At the very least, he is in dialogue with the same set of concepts as these political theorists.

Three issues reside within this critique of liberal entitlement² and are quite pronounced in the political teachings of Ratzinger: the absence of humility and obligation and a challenge to philosophical obsolescence brought on by the Enlightenment. While Ratzinger does not position himself as an adversary to the universal principles and standards of modern political theory, liberal entitlement is a force the Church counters throughout its history, even as the concept reinvents or manifests itself in new forms.

² By "liberal entitlement," I am referring to Locke's notion in his *Second Treatise on Government* whereby individuals acquire property from nature by mixing their labor with unclaimed objects. These objects are rightfully theirs until they amass an amount of objects at which point spoiling would occur, in which case the objects must be exchanged for currency or something else that does not spoil. This right transfers from the state of nature to the political state, which considers property rights as an essential protection and critical underpinning of political formation. From there, protection of property extends to one's personhood and will (Book II, chapter V: Of Property).

What followed the Enlightenment was a culture of refutation that led to a tendency to render ideas of previous generations obsolete as a particular paradigm was promoted to the dominant and intellectually accepted way of thinking. Thomas Kuhn famously described this as the “transformations of paradigms” and the “usual development pattern of mature science” (1996, 12). This approach creates a great, humbling irony, for while scientific revolutions boast of discovering scientific laws, the discoverers of these laws must accept a degree of uncertainty since the laws can be easily discarded at the next paradigm transformation.

However, unlike in the hard sciences, when the discipline of philosophy severs ties with the cultural and intellectual heritage of previous generations, the aspect of humility is lost. The social definitions and philosophical underpinnings of any society do not simply disappear, nor can they be ignored by rational actors as these actors attempt to purify their judgments and decisions. The communitarian critique challenged this loss of a sense of humility and the idea of obsolescing one’s past via the authority of autonomous reason in the perceived neutral original position put forth by Rawls and in the modern individual who reinvents him/herself free of consideration of communal identities and obligations.

Ratzinger’s own challenges to the loss of humility and Rawls’s views are seen in his insistence that Europeans cannot ignore the sacred values, mores, and customs that are the foundation of any civilization. Specifically, he calls attention to the Christian origins of the Enlightenment and the necessity of supplementing biblical interpretation with an understanding of the Bible’s Greek and other classical influences. The theme of humility is also prevalent in his explanations of faith. He goes to great lengths to explain

his faith's relationship with reason, and, in doing so, reveals the ongoing renewal and perfectible aspects of faith. For Ratzinger, faith takes on a similar characteristic of virtue and character development discussed in part of the communitarian critique³, which sees human nature as perennially in need of fulfilling its potential. And while perfection can never be achieved, when humanity falls off this course of at least attempting to fulfill its potential, moral disorder spreads.

Obligation in Ratzinger's works is achieved through a communal narrative that reinforces historical social attachments by way of a group identity, and his construction of a European narrative produces a form of communitarianism quite similar to that found in MacIntyre's *After Virtue*. Taylor's communitarian thought in "Atomism" is germane to Ratzinger with regards to virtue development, which recognizes the insufficiency of human nature and a need to improve this natural state, as well as the importance of a binding multigenerational reach which resembles Ratzinger's own grasp for Hellenized Christianity and his idea that every culture ought to preserve its *sense of the sacred*. Sandel's *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* and Walzer's *Spheres of Justice* are less in alignment with Ratzinger than MacIntyre and Taylor, but are engaged with the topics of identity and social definition that Ratzinger's works wrestle with and his papacy as Benedict XVI is certainly facing. Sandel has a lot to say about competing identities that Ratzinger could benefit from when addressing the European cultural crisis, and Walzer's system of distributive justice would be quite applicable to the Church's writings on

³ Specifically, this is in reference to MacIntyre and Taylor, though Walzer can also be included for his educational discussion on self-respect as a way to curb an insecure disposition in humans to dominate others.

subsidiarity, labor rights, and distributivism, which all speak to human rights and liberal entitlement.

Overall, Ratzinger's communitarianism is more nuanced than both the Church's anti-liberal history and general communitarian political theory, which produces a platform of desired policy outcomes that contain some common spirit of balancing the needs of the individual with those of the group and advocating a sense of responsibility among a constituency with identifiable common ends. His communitarianism integrates more history and philosophy than both of these general forms, and while the communitarian critique certainly contains an unfavorable view of the Enlightenment—even as Ratzinger takes his own issue with the era—he attempts to reconcile the Enlightenment with the Church, which is a cue from Vatican II's project to engage the modern world. Yet Ratzinger's philosophy differs from previous Catholic social thought produced in encyclical letters in that these letters are largely about *how* the common good is applied. He explains *why* it is applied and how to encourage its application from a socio-philosophic perspective that resembles St. Thomas's idea that moral obligation binds humans to law, and that this cannot be done through force but only by attachment to a conscience that recognizes the common good. The three prominent features of Ratzinger's communitarianism—humility, obligation, and obsolescence—are part of an effort to solidify this binding.

The Church, like many predecessors of modernity, must find a way to rid itself of society's perception that it is an anachronistic institution destined for obsolescence. Ratzinger takes up this idea through a contention that Christianity is part of the Enlightenment's heritage and that relativism is what spreads when *the sacred* is no longer

anchored in a society. In addition, humility helps maintain a healthy equilibrium in public debates, as it serves as a buffer to any ideology or theology that becomes excessively autonomous of any refutation or challenge. Finally, obligation and civility are established through a binding narrative of the deepest beliefs, language, and customs of one's cultural and philosophic heritages.

Selecting and Defining the Communitarian Critique

Communitarianism is isolated to this period of time and these four particular works since they represent a strong sampling of initial reactions to Rawls or Nozick. That is to say, I do not attempt to place Ratzinger's works within, say, all of Taylor's catalog, for some points Taylor makes take on new meanings later in his career, or his works make other contributions to communitarian themes beyond those noted in this study. For example, Taylor discusses narrative and identity in *Sources of the Self* (1989), when he uses the phrase "transcendental condition of interlocution," which speaks to "having a grasp on our own language, that we in some fashion confront it or relate it to the language of others."⁴ In this study, narrative is primarily associated with MacIntyre. Even Rawls, the author whom the communitarian critique is primarily responding to, alters and evolves his arguments from *A Theory of Justice* in subsequent works such as "Justice as Fairness: Political Not Metaphysical" (1985) and *Political Liberalism* (1993). Such is the evolutionary nature of political philosophy, or at least, that is my interpretation of how

⁴ See pp. 38–39 in the chapter, "The Self in Moral Space" of Part I: Identity and the Good in Taylor's *Sources of the Self*.

collective dialogues among peers occur within the discipline. What Ratzinger adds to this discussion is a tangible example of an institutional administrator wrangling with the issues that the communitarian critique is attempting to pull down from Rawlsian abstractness into a materialized, possibly implementable political landscape. Lastly, from a practical standpoint, it would become quite cumbersome to disentangle which Rawls the authors are responding to. The initial reaction offers a “pure” first response of developed communitarian works. Describing this—the communitarian critique—as a reaction and event also eliminates the difficulties that arise in labeling these four authors as communitarians.⁵

It may seem a bold contention to label Ratzinger a communitarian, yet they are generally understood to be members of a paradigm who seek to balance the rights and responsibilities of the individual with the needs of the group—the common good—a theme found throughout the Church’s history. What I hope to demonstrate is that Ratzinger’s deepest and most developed political thoughts can be understood within this important period of writing in contemporary political philosophy. In doing so, I

⁵ For example, MacIntyre has been quoted as saying, “In spite of rumors to the contrary, I am not and never have been a communitarian” (Bell 2010), while Sandel has reflected on the liberal-communitarian debates of the 1980s with an outsider’s tone. Specifically, he called the term communitarian “misleading” since it implied that rights were dependent on the “values or preferences that prevail in any given community at any given time” (2005, 212–213). Similarly, Taylor once expressed he was “unhappy with the term ‘communitarianism’” since it seemed to be a construction of liberalism’s critics looking for an “all-embracing principle, which would in some equal and opposite way exalt the life of the community over everything” (1994, 250). However, it should be noted that Taylor contributed a number of articles to the communitarian journal, *The Responsive Community* (see Vol. 3, Issue 4, Fall 1993; Vol. 6, Issue 3, Summer 1996; Vol. 13, Issue 4, Fall 2003; and Vol. 14, Issue 1, Winter 2003/2004). Walzer, who uses the phrase “communitarian critique,” describes it as part of a correction to liberalism’s “self-subverting doctrine” but stops short when this phrase begins to suggest that liberalism is “literally incoherent” (1990, 15).

ultimately explore where these select works by Ratzinger fit within this dialogue and where they do not, how they are situated within “garden variety” communitarianism of political theory and the Catholic Church’s anti-liberal history, as well as how they contribute to Ratzinger’s own communitarian political thought.

The Events: Criteria for Inclusion

Before explaining how the events covered in this dissertation were selected, it should first be noted why Ratzinger himself was chosen as the research subject. Ratzinger has penetrated and shaped Catholic political and philosophical thought, education, and far-reaching policies of the Church. One individual alone does not represent an institution with centuries of philosophic and institutional development, but his influence within this window of four key events is part of what this study attempts to address, at least from a cultural-political standpoint. He was not merely a powerful executor of a large institution in either his capacity as a cardinal or now as pope, but also a writer mindful to discuss Western philosophy and how it impacted European history, reason, and the evolution of the Church. Ratzinger is a unique combination of an authority figure within the Church and an intellectual as a private theologian and university academic. He earned his doctorate in theology from the University of Munich in 1953.⁶ He then spent eighteen years in various teaching positions across four universities in Germany through successive appointments: University of Bonn (1959–1963), University of Münster (1963–1966), University of Tübingen (1966–1969), and University of Regensburg (1969–

⁶ Allen, *Cardinal Ratzinger: The Vatican’s Enforcer of the Faith*, 34.

1977).⁷ Before becoming an authority figure, Ratzinger was a force in the Second Vatican Council. Present for all four sessions of the Council (1962–1965), he served as a theological expert, a *peritus*, for Cardinal Joseph Frings (Cologne, Germany), who was an influential cardinal at that time and represented one of the wealthiest archdioceses in Europe. During Vatican II, Ratzinger composed draft documents, organized coalitions, and prepared bishops for floor debates.⁸ He is also noted as influencing *Dei Verbum* (On the Word of God) and contributing to *Lumen Gentium* (the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church) at Vatican II.⁹ He was made a bishop and cardinal by Paul VI in 1977 and was appointed Prefect for the Sacred Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) by John Paul II in 1981. This position in the CDF is regarded by some as the second most significant within the Catholic Church after that of the pope.¹⁰ He is also responsible for the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992). All of these experiences signify exposure to, and influence upon, Church policy that Ratzinger would be aware of; however, it is important to distinguish between the documents produced under his authority. For example, documents produced for the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith deserve different attention than those that take the form of lectures, addresses, interviews, and correspondence when he was acting as a private theologian. One also must acknowledge which hat Ratzinger is wearing when speaking or writing, though they should be consistent if he's in alignment with the larger vision of the Church. Documents produced in a capacity of authority would likely have additional scrutiny and possible

⁷ Nichols, *The Thought of Pope Benedict XVI* 24; and Rowland, *Ratzinger's Faith: The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI*, 1.

⁸ Allen, *Cardinal Ratzinger: The Vatican's Enforcer of the Faith*, 46.

⁹ *Ibid*, 56.

¹⁰ Rowland, *Ratzinger's Faith: The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI*, 1.

collaborators, which is why I have deferred to works that would most likely be Ratzinger's private thoughts and why this study looks at works produced by Ratzinger himself.

Thematically, the basic criteria for inclusion in this study are works that contain issues of importance to a political theorist studying liberal democracy concerned with fundamental topics within the field of political philosophy, namely, objective-subjective distinctions, autonomy, and the common good. These represent high-level categories that the communitarian critique's themes are either subsets within or the parent category of (i.e., autonomy). The events selected were all produced in the more recent portion of Ratzinger's career and address challenges of the post-classical world: an encounter with Jürgen Habermas (2004), an exchange with Italian Senate president Marcello Pera (2004), Ratzinger's "Crisis of Cultures" address (2005), and his *Regensburg Lecture* (formally known as "Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections") (2006).¹¹ The first three events occurred prior to his papacy; the *Regensburg Lecture* is the only work delivered during his time as pope. Some of the events are supplemented with insights derived from some of his previous works to illuminate some of their key terms. Particularly, I often draw on three in-depth, monograph-length interviews Ratzinger gave prior to his papacy: *The Ratzinger Report* (1985), *Salt of the Earth* (1996), and *God and the World* (2000). The task of bringing to light in detail everything Ratzinger has written would be an encyclopedic endeavor well beyond the bounds of this

¹¹ While two of Benedict XVI's first three encyclical letters, namely, *Deus Caritas Est* (2005) and *Caritas in Veritate* (2009), certainly contain messages that would have been of interest to this study, it is difficult to determine to what extent other Vatican hands might have helped to shape these documents. They are nonetheless further evidence of communitarian themes in the Church climate that I refer to anecdotally.

project. Still, those most germane are used to inform some of the events analyzed in this project. Ratzinger repeats many of his positions throughout his career; however, some are presented in more complex and developed works than others—these are the focus of this study.

The Habermas encounter connects Ratzinger to a prominent contemporary theorist in a discussion in which each lays out the limits and role of religion in a secular society. In the end, both an atheist and a believer come to agreement on the limits society must place upon both the traditions of Enlightenment and religious doctrines—just as unchecked religious orthodoxy presents a danger to society, so does reason without religious foundations. This event serves as a core piece to convey Ratzinger’s rationalism, which guides his thought through the other works.

The Marcello Pera exchange was selected because Pera is both a professor and a notable public official in the Italian Senate who served as its president from 2001 to 2006. The exchange touches on the role of God in public and private life, civil religion, and Pera’s own critique of relativism as a poison in the West. The exchange began several months after the Habermas encounter, with Ratzinger delivering a lecture in the Capital Room of the Italian Senate that covered a range of issues related to European identity, including the West’s abandonment of its spiritual roots, the challenges and values of multiculturalism, and cyclical theories on the rise and fall of civilizations. In short, the lecture sought to recover a social glue that once bound Europe together, which Ratzinger diagnosed as a respect for *the sacred*. Many of the sentiments in Ratzinger’s lecture ironically mirrored those delivered a day earlier by Italian secular philosopher and politician, Marcello Pera. Ratzinger’s lecture was not a reply to Pera, although third party

observers drew a connection between the two. Through independent premises, both lecturers linked the erosion of universal values in Europe to the rise of relativism in the West. When the similarities of the lectures were brought to the respective authors' attention, it led to an exchange in which the two thinkers responded to one another and further delineated their respective approaches to civil religion, multiculturalism, and national identity.

The "Crisis of Cultures" address provides an account of Ratzinger's interpretation of the Enlightenment and Kant, as well as Ratzinger's understanding of Christianity as the religion of reason. This event occurred more than a year after the Habermas encounter, and it is another attempt to resolve the tension between faith and reason and faith's relationship to Europe's cultural identity crisis. Here, Ratzinger describes Christianity as the religion of Logos, a faith he believes to be deeply influential in the origins of the Enlightenment. While highly critical of the legacy of the Enlightenment in this address, he stops short of rejecting it and the entire modern project of philosophy altogether. Instead, he co-opts the Enlightenment by attributing its underpinnings to Christianity, which acts as an attempt to help re-establish a Christian European identity when taken in combination with the Pera exchange. In doing so, Ratzinger has left himself in a very curious position—if Christianity is to be the religion of reason, how does this help to remove the political relativism of which Ratzinger and other Church figures are so critical?

Ratzinger answers this question in the *Regensburg Lecture* by explaining the meaning of reason through the prologue of John's Gospel in the Bible, using this text to define "Logos": "Logos means both reason and word" and, according to John, in

Genesis's beginning there was Logos and Logos is God.¹² In explaining the importance of the Greek influence in scripture, Ratzinger tacitly puts forth a social glue for holding the West together, particularly its Christian population.

In all of these events, Ratzinger is reacting to the legacy of modernism and is looking for a way to reformulate the Church's approach to current issues unforeseen in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, such as Europe's identity and cultural crises, the limits of liberty, and the need to balance the extremes of faith and reason.

Lastly, it is worth mentioning that the mainstream reaction to a study of Ratzinger's political thought would almost certainly stimulate an expectation that the Church's pro-life position be a subject of discussion in this research project. It was with great hesitation that I included mention of the passages in Ratzinger's works in which abortion is presented as an example of the human condition to dominate nature and the dangers of modern science. Such passages are indeed present in some of these works, though they are not the focal point. The topic of abortion has been manipulated by both pro-lifers and the pro-choice movement to no productive end to date. At the heart of this debate is the concept of autonomy interpreted through liberal entitlement, which both sides endorse, and often without self-awareness of this fact. While there are obvious political implications for the Church's pro-life position in Ratzinger's work, they are tangential in their relation to freedom in democratic society, and these issues are only raised within the context of the autonomous self. This study remains more fixed on the ideologies that guide the establishment and organization of democratic institutions, making any position in the pro-life movement a secondary issue in my work here.

¹² Ratzinger (Benedict XVI), "Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections," paragraph 5.

Approach, Organization, and Synopses

The chapters that focus on the four events of Ratzinger are organized chronologically. This organizing principle does not infer progressive development in Ratzinger's political thought. Rather, there are core topics throughout the works presented here that are slightly more developed or insightful than the previous treatment of each event as discussed in the previous chapter. This development is by selection and coincidence, though it seems fitting since there could be institutional constraints imposed upon the professional context in which Ratzinger is writing. Organizing the events this way allows one to investigate whether shifts occur, as we see works prior to his papacy (Pera and Habermas exchanges) immediately before his elevation, which would be at a time of assessing career aspirations (*Crisis*); and following his rise to head of the Roman Catholic Church (*Regensburg*). There is a generally consistent body of work throughout these events that is at odds with modern liberalism, though the European cultural crisis (or even simpler—the issue of pluralism) is an evolving dialogue throughout.

The goal of this introduction, chapter 1, is to set the groundwork for why the field of political philosophy should be interested in the writings of Joseph Ratzinger and to clarify the organization of this project. Chapter 2, “The Communitarian Baseline: Critiquing the Liberal Self,” sets up how a “communitarian critique” standard will be constructed to measure the four events that follow. This sets the primer to understanding how Ratzinger's treatments of reason and revelation, the Enlightenment, universal values, identity, and pluralism are engaged with the same set of concepts addressed in the communitarian critique. This chapter looks at the reaction to the original position in Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* as well as the libertarian spirit of Nozick's *Anarchy, State,*

and Utopia, as contained in the works of the following authors often associated with the communitarian critique: Sandel's *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, Walzer's *Spheres of Justice*, Taylor's "Atomism," and MacIntyre's *After Virtue*. To do justice to the arguments of the authors linked to communitarian political theory, this chapter presents the general thesis of their works, as well as a discussion of central themes that connect them. In the chapters that follow, which discuss Ratzinger's works, the themes collected in the communitarian critique develop into his own three-part communitarianism: humility, obligation, and obsolescence.

Chapter 3, "Faith, Reason, and Law in the Habermas Encounter," looks at a 2004 exchange between Ratzinger and political theorist Jürgen Habermas that primarily addressed the relationship between revelation and reason, the tension at the center of modernity's break with the theological roots of its philosophic past, and any genuine legacy dependencies that may need to be revived. The tension between faith and reason is one front on which two seemingly incompatible views collide in a pluralistic world and the relevance of revelation and religion in modern and contemporary civilizations is often debated. In this chapter, this takes the form of objective-subjective distinctions, the inevitable relationship between faith and reason, and the subject at the heart of all of these tensions—first principles. This tension is demonstrated as commensurate with the issue at the core of the rationalist debate of the communitarian critique: universalism versus particularism. It also brings to light rationalist insufficiency and what role humility plays, as each side in the faith-reason debate must release itself from complete autonomy. To understand the theological backdrop of Ratzinger's view on faith and reason, this chapter first reviews Pope John Paul II's 1998 encyclical letter, *Fides et Ratio* (*Faith and*

Reason), and the definitions of two key terms used in Ratzinger's Munich essay as used in his previous writings—faith and reason—before then moving on to the encounter with Habermas.

Chapter 4, “Social Solidarity, Identity, and the Challenge of Pluralism in the Pera Exchange” analyzes a 2004 exchange between Ratzinger and then president of the Italian Senate Marcello Pera. The exchange is a dialogue on the challenge that competing identities pose for the respect of accepted virtues, customs, and mores, which Ratzinger describes in this event as *a sense of the sacred*. His exchange with Pera picks up the discussion of reason and how the Enlightenment and modern rationalism contributed to the proliferation of contemporary relativism and a decaying European identity via the dilution or obsolescence of *the sacred*. The communitarian critique's focus on the individual decision-making process in the perceived neutral original position highlights several core oversights of Rawls that are germane to Ratzinger's dialogue with Pera. This includes such concepts from the communitarian critique as broken moral language, the varying value of social goods such as identity, the acceptance of communal obligations, and the recurring criticism of autonomy, which in the Pera exchange can be understood as the catalyst of philosophic plurality.

With this need for a strong cultural identity established, chapter 5, “Modernity, Enlightenment, and Familiar Social Glue,” then examines Ratzinger's 2005 *Crisis of Cultures* address and the 2006 *Regensburg Lecture* to determine which story should fulfill the *sense of a sacred* and serve as a communal narrative in the West to create a sense of civic obligation. In my analysis of this chapter, I conclude that Ratzinger's final two pieces install the European citizen into a constellation of Western touch-points that

begin with ancient Greek civilization, continue into early Christianity, and struggle to survive in the Enlightenment—an era he believes is in need of great redefinition. Since each chapter serves as a building block up to this point, this section of the chapter includes some analysis, but does not mark the end of this study. This section’s analysis returns to the previous events—the Habermas encounter and Pera exchange—to explain why there is pressure to reverse the de-Hellenization of Christianity at large, or at least reinforce why the Catholic Church has taken a position that places the Bible within an academic system of supplementary literature and history. This proposed system uses instruments of common language to help counter a European cultural crisis, especially if Ratzinger is serious about Hellenized Christianity. The narrative approach from the communitarian critique also comes into play here since it contributes to group and individual productivity via a sense of obligation that fosters an environment suitable for fulfilling human potentials.

My conclusion, chapter 6, compares Ratzinger to the communitarian critique at both a macro-level theme assessment to show how the main themes of that critique are developed in Ratzinger’s works as humility, obligation, and obsolescence, as well as at a one-on-one comparison with each of the four political theorists. This chapter also reviews the Catholic Church’s anti-liberal and anti-modern outputs over the past hundred and fifty years and the influence of St. Thomas on the Church’s long-standing promotion of the common good to identify some potential explanatory factors in the intellectual climate of the Church that make Ratzinger’s placement within the dialogue of the communitarian critique of Rawls and Nozick a logical designation. This final chapter also explores whether Ratzinger has created his own unique communitarianism, differing from not only

the Church's anti-liberal output but also from other forms of garden variety communitarianism in political theory.

I ultimately conclude that MacIntyre and Taylor are most similar to Ratzinger, particularly in their notions of the improvability of human nature and the existence of obligations; while Sandel is a voice that Ratzinger would be well served to listen to with regard to how the Church can compete in a marketplace of ideas and beliefs, and Walzer's discussion of changing definitions of social identity and membership present a worst-case scenario for the uphill journey Ratzinger has in re-crafting a Western identity that will reject relativism and extreme individualism in a way that is not seen as antiquated. I also find that Walzer's system of distributive justice could easily be discussed in conjunction with the Church's social doctrine on economics and labor, particularly as it relates to how the definition of power changes over time and the Church's adjustments to account for this.

Impact and Contribution

When this research project began, I sought to demonstrate that Ratzinger was a political thinker engaged with resolving some of the central issues that contemporary political theory wrestles with. However, something more nuanced was revealed after researching his writings—he seemed to be sorting through the same topics as late twentieth-century communitarians and liberals from a theological perspective, and his understanding of political philosophy was well demonstrated. With any new pope, there are predictions of whether he will be drawn to either the Thomistic or Augustinian poles within the philosophic tradition of the Church. This is certainly a relevant question, but it

marginalizes the issues each pope will have to confront during his papacy. It also leaves their relevance and standing in regard to modernism and the post-modern world curiously absent.

My hope is that this research project will contribute to the field of political philosophy in several ways, all of which are related to the communitarian critique. First, the topic of liberal entitlement and its effects on identity are still open for discussion; in Ratzinger we see a Western example of this discussion represented by a theologian, and later a state executor, working through the challenges of pluralism and identity. Second, this project's examination of Ratzinger's attempts to re-bridge a gap between philosophy and religion offers a discussion of whether one can mend the connection once severed by the Enlightenment movement. Third, as this research project dusts off the communitarian critique, three crucial themes are revealed, which are also at the core of Ratzinger's own communitarianism: humility, obligation, and obsolescence. These lost concepts are of timely significance given the recent collapse of global financial markets. If one interprets the Great Recession as a demonstration of the limits of economic liberalism, it should stimulate discussions on the role and reach of government, or how to install properly conditioned citizens to govern a just government regardless of that government's structure. While further restrictions on individual freedoms would be an act of dialing back political progression, one ought to consider what might be done to tame the libertarian spirit as it is bound up in both collective narratives and identity and fosters an intellectual climate unwelcoming to humility, obligation, connections to previous generations and their culture, and, ultimately, charity. While this moves the discussion forward into a separate dialogue on distributivism, where Walzer is of interest, the

concepts of narrative, identity, and social glue are what create a sense of obligation and solidarity to account for the interests of all and not simply when they have fallen on hard times. Prevention of catastrophes is at issue.

As Pope Benedict XVI, Ratzinger describes charity in his third encyclical letter, *Caritas in Veritate* (2009), as the heart of Catholic social doctrine and an act that “goes beyond justice.” Further, it “demands justice: recognition and respect for the legitimate rights of individuals and peoples” (no. 2). These statements should not be confused with state socialism; rather, they represent a human condition that is compelled to keep the interests of the common good in focus. This also means there will be fringes and edges of law and distribution where one will have to look to a higher law. In Benedict’s first encyclical, *Deus Caritas* (2005), he reminds us that: “Instead of contributing through individual works of charity to maintaining the status quo, we need to build a just social order in which all receive their share of the world’s goods and no longer have to depend on charity” (no. 26). In the communitarian critique, claims of charity and economic justice are certainly squarely aimed at Nozick, since Rawls is better understood as a welfare-state liberal, though their principle driver is the same—liberal entitlement as produced and evolved from modernity. While Ratzinger is focused on a cultural and moral crisis, this liberal entitlement has important implications for other crises, including economic ones which one can say were driven by human failure to see the importance of societal and generational bonds. As autonomous individuals reinvent themselves as simply they alone choose and dispose of the possibility of human insufficiency, there exists a potential to forgo the connection that exists between identity and accountability, or more precisely—obligation.

Chapter 2: The Communitarian Baseline: Critiquing the Liberal Self

Introduction

Communitarian Critique Overview

The communitarian critique in political philosophy is largely considered a period of writing in the late twentieth century that embodies a response to the transcendental liberal self constructed in John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* (1971) as well as the libertarian spirit of Robert Nozick's *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (1974), which was itself a critical reaction to Rawls, albeit one that challenged Rawls's system of distributive justice. While these two writers represent considerably different, and one might even argue incompatible views—Rawls, a welfare state liberal, and Nozick, a minimalist–state libertarian—both ground their works with the philosophical underpinning of a liberal entitlement that elevates the primacy of individual rights over communal considerations. This chapter looks at significant writings from four authors who represent an initial reaction to Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* and, somewhat tangentially, Nozick's *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*.¹³ Included are Michael Sandel's *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (1982), Michael Walzer's *Spheres of Justice* (1983), Charles Taylor's "Atomism" essay

¹³ Michael Sandel primarily takes on Rawls almost line by line in *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (1982), though he does bring Nozick into this discussion. Michael Walzer's *Spheres of Justice* (1983) was the result of co-teaching a course with Robert Nozick, though great tribute is paid to Rawls in the Acknowledgments of this work for providing the philosophical backdrop in which Walzer was writing. Charles Taylor's essay "Atomism" is directed at Nozick, though the concepts can also be applied to the general communitarian spirit attacks on Rawls taking place at this time. Lastly, Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* (1981) often pairs the incompatible positions of Rawls and Nozick as representatives of contemporary philosophy lacking conceptions of classical virtue.

(1979), and Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* (1981).¹⁴ These four communitarian political theorists are broadly addressing how polities enter a negotiation with the autonomous individual of liberal society while still preserving a concept of the common good. How can autonomy, or at least its illusion, be preserved while maintaining a non-coercive social order that does not lead to the neglect of one's fellow humans because of liberal entitlement? One solution derived from this span of communitarian literature leads to the power of narrative, to language, and to the conditional identities that show responsibilities and obligations are just as important as rights.

Six themes emerge in the writings of Sandel, Walzer, Taylor, and MacIntyre, many of which are intertwined: 1) the insufficiency of human nature; 2) the Enlightenment and its legacy as an origin of moral rot; 3) a challenge to individual autonomy; 4) responsibilities and obligations; 5) the primacy of history, particularism, and anti-hypotheticals; and 6) the power of narrative and language.

These themes are also common to other studies¹⁵ on communitarian thinkers of this era, although this research project's analysis of them differs greatly in that more

¹⁴ Citations to the texts of political theorists are abbreviated as follows: *AV*: *After Virtue* (MacIntyre); *ASU*: *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (Nozick); *LLJ*: *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Sandel); and *SOJ*: *Sphere of Justice* (Walzer).

¹⁵ Stephen Mulhall and Adam Swift's *Liberals & Communitarians* (1996) presents five agendas, or themes, in the communitarian response to Rawls: 1) the "antecedently individuated or unencumbered" conception of a person; 2) asocial individualism and the relationship of individuals to their community, particularly the extent to which societies shape identities and values and communal conceptions of the good; 3) a universalism that is too broad, undercutting the importance of culture specificity; 4) subjectivism vs. objectivism and the idea that "that individual's choice of ends, values, and conceptions of the good are arbitrary expressions of preference, essentially incapable of rational justification"; and 5) anti-perfectionism and neutrality (158–160). David Morrice's article, "The Liberal-Communitarian Debate in Contemporary Political Philosophy and Its Significance for International Relations" (2000), summarizes studies on

emphasis is placed upon narrative and language and how they help create a sense of obligation among citizens, as well as criticism of the philosophic amnesia caused by the Enlightenment, since for Ratzinger these offer potential solutions to his own communitarian challenges. This chapter also focuses on only the initial communitarian reaction to Rawls and not clarifications made by Rawls in later works.¹⁶ In succeeding chapters, parallels are demonstrated between the six themes mentioned above and Ratzinger's concerns regarding how to reconcile the Church with the modern and post-modern worlds. In his literature, these communitarian themes are seen in his discussions of identity, universalism versus particularism, objective-subjective distinctions, the Hellenized Christian narrative, reconciliation of the Enlightenment and modernity, extreme individualism, and the challenges of pluralism. Ultimately, these topics coalesce into Ratzinger's own communitarian political theory, with the distinctive themes of humility, obligation, and a challenge to philosophic obsolescence brought on by the Enlightenment and its successors. Humility surfaces in the communitarian topics of the

communitarians as emanating from three common claims: the social nature of humans, "normative claims about the value of community," and "meta-ethical claims about the status and justification of political principles as shared values of the community" (235). In a similar condensed approach, Daniel Bell's "Communitarianism" (2009) entry in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* uses three broad categories to explain communitarianism in the late twentieth century: 1) the importance of cultural considerations, seen as the debate of "Universalism Versus Particularism" that counters the universalist claims of liberalism and illuminates the impact culture has on constructing rights; 2) Rawls's "overly individualistic conception of the self," which Bell puts under the category of "The Debate Over the Self;" and 3) "The Politics of Community," which turns to the communitarians of the 1990s—such as Amitai Etzioni—who promoted policies that sought to balance between rights and responsibilities in liberal society and relieve the atomistic, self-directed, and lonely characteristics of citizens.

¹⁶ For example, those that further refined the precepts of *A Theory of Justice* contained in the article, "Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical," from *Philosophy & Public Affairs* Vol. 14, No. 3 (Summer 1985) and *Political Liberalism* (1993).

insufficiency of human nature and the challenge of autonomy. Obligation is a theme itself, but it also absorbs the discussions of narrative method and power of language as means for fostering a sense of obligation. The counter to obsolescence is seen in criticism of the Enlightenment and its successors and the importance of history and particularism in achieving a social solidarity.

Reacting to Rawls and Nozick

Much of the criticism directed at Rawls challenges the hypothetical self in the “original position” that resides behind, and is sustained by, the “veil of ignorance.” This original position is an impartial and ahistorical condition that Rawls believes will help achieve a state of clear deliberation in which individuals discover objective, timeless principles of justice. The veil of ignorance facilitates and enhances this state, as all impediments to objective observation are dropped: “no one knows his place in society, his class position or social status, nor does anyone know his fortune in the distribution of natural assets and abilities, his intelligence, strength, and the like” (*ATJ*, 12). Beyond the immediate situation under evaluation in the original position, Rawls hopes this condition will create a point of clarity that transcends even generational differences (*ATJ*, 137). This transcendence infers universalism, and communitarians take issue with this, as this objection is represented by the number of particularist approaches that question both the practicality and value of the Rawlsian original position. Impractical, because this state of clarity is simply unattainable; valueless, because the omission of historical and cultural details removes the meanings and considerations needed for understanding the conceptions of justice referenced in an individual’s deliberative state.

Communitarians contend that Rawls asks too much of the hypothetical individual, for his narrow portrait of the self obscures the effects a community and its values, identity, history, obligations, and contingencies have on the abstracted actor. Part of the Kantian allure in the original position assumes the individual will choose just actions, so in some ways the veil of ignorance and the original position are parts of a contrarian version of the Socratic Paradox, which claims no person would willingly commit unjust acts voluntarily.¹⁷ Any unjust act is involuntary because if individuals consciously understood the consequences of their actions, Socrates believes they would choose otherwise. The Socratic Paradox infers that individuals become enlightened through the acquisition of a complete—or at the very least a robust—set of knowledge and facts that aids in predicting the exact implications their actions place and sometimes intrude upon others. Therefore, if they knew unintended consequences of their choices would produce unjust acts (or evil), they would surely alter their actions to avoid undesirable outcomes. It is not an involuntary act done out of compulsion of duty or even force, but rather out of ignorance and error. Socrates's view is forgiving because it infers that humans will more often than not choose just outcomes when they know the precise consequences of their actions, making it difficult to hold them accountable. It is it hard to hold persons culpable if they are ignorant of the good, the just, and the noble. Rawls takes a similar forgiving view of human nature, but prefers to sterilize the assumptions and influences that keep the decision-maker from creating unbiased and impartial decisions. In the original

¹⁷ See Plato's *Gorgias* (509e), in which Socrates asks Callicles to confirm their earlier agreement that "no-one acts unjustly on purpose, but that all those who act unjustly do so unwillingly"; and *Protagoras* (345d-e) in which Socrates states: "For my part, I'm pretty much of the opinion that no wise person thinks anyone in the world goes wrong willingly, or performs disgraceful or evil actions willingly. They are well aware that all those who do disgraceful and evil things do them involuntarily."

position, particulars are removed from the deliberative state. With this universalist approach to decision-making in mind, one can see why the communitarian critique aims to reconcile issues with identity and virtue in the Rawlsian self. Rawls subtracts certain aspects of sociological make-up that communitarians believe are impossible to bracket out of an individual's decision-making process. For Sandel, this reconciliation means reflection without distance; for MacIntyre, it is resuscitating Aristotelian virtue to alleviate moral ambiguity; for Taylor, this is the generational obligation connection he sees between freedom and responsibility; and for Walzer, it is cultivating self-respect in the individual and setting up silos of power to limit realms of domination.

While these writers do not engage in the antics of Aristophanean comedy, they are indeed grounding a philosopher's abstracted postulations to remove the philosopher from the clouds so they can deal with more conditional material. It is easy to see why sociological and narrative solutions are posed in response to Rawls. MacIntyre, Sandel, and, to a degree, Taylor, offer a critique of the Rawlsian self¹⁸ that focuses on the role community plays in shaping one's identity, the obligations and responsibilities one owes fellow citizens, and the power of narrative and language. Similarly, Walzer is concerned with cultural factors that shape the meaning of social goods and justice, though he is most concerned with developing a system of distributive justice to curb the human disposition to dominate others. As such, and true to his self-described particularist approach, the topics of Walzer's *Spheres of Justice* can become quite focused as he enters tangible

¹⁸ For MacIntyre, this not explicitly directed at Rawls in the text but can be considered the modern emotivist self who seeks nothing more than autonomy in determining moral obligations.

investigations into how to deal with schools, neighborhoods, goods in the marketplace, and other areas.

The criticism from this initial set of communitarian literature directed at Nozick and the libertarian spirit is generally concerned with the degree to which Nozick so freely articulates arguments that run contrary to a common good and the encouragement of altruistic behavior. Sweeping sentiments and the implications of this work are encapsulated in such claims as “[t]here is no justified sacrifice of some of us for others” and that using an individual to the benefit of others simply uses him/her. Nozick even goes so far as to suggest that a common good is nothing more than a tool for manipulation when one makes a sacrifice for the sake of others. The individual coerced or compelled to act in this situation receives no “overbalancing good from his sacrifice, and no one is entitled to force this upon him—least of all a state or government that claims his allegiance” (*ASU*, 33). Communitarians, notably Taylor, see this as shortsighted, since individuals surely must acknowledge the benefits received from their forefathers and what this entails for providing for the next generation.

Nozick first justifies the minimal state (night-watchman), which arises out of protective associations, initially as a dominant protective association and then as an association with territory, for which the state becomes responsible. The state provides basic protections to its citizens but forgoes any attempts at redistributing property, for this would also be an act of violation based on Nozick’s entitlement theory that goods are secured through either just transfer or acquisition of holdings (even if this means one has acquired a disproportionate share of resources), or rectification of injustices. Walzer’s response to such logic is that while the marketplace does resolve and reward itself

through competitive exchanges, it runs amuck when individuals or entities become excessively wealthy and powerful under two conditions: 1) “the extraction not only of wealth but of prestige and influence from the market” and 2) “the deployment of power within it” (*SOJ*, 11). A discussion of such distributive matters is material for another project, but certainly finds itself within the communitarian perspective since it touches on the common good, as well as Church literature that takes a pro-labor position.¹⁹ This is not a subject discussed in the four Ratzinger works analyzed in the chapters that follow in this research project. That said, criticism of Nozick largely focuses on two topics: his neglect for generational obligations in *Anarchy* and that work’s general libertarian spirit. His system of rights and acquisition lacks humility, for one must surely acknowledge, for example, that others may be better skilled at determining how taxes could be spent for equitable distribution and the most effective return on investments. There is a prideful inability to accept a sense of hierarchy and diversity of skills. He does recognize a chaotic form of hierarchy—one that benefits those predisposed by nature who either possess a motivation to continually work or a clever and creative character to increase one’s holdings.

¹⁹ Several encyclical letters take a pro-labor rights position. Leo XIII’s *Rerum Novarum* (1891) supports the right of workers to organize and explores how to find a middle ground between socialism and unbridled capitalism. The encyclical is later echoed on its 90th anniversary by John Paul II in *Laborem Exercens* (1981). In *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931), Pius XI condemns capitalism and communism, but argues, “Wage earners should become sharers in ownership or management or participate in some fashion in the profits received” (no. 65). And in *Caritas in Veritate* (2007), Ratzinger as Benedict XVI calls for unions to “be open to the new perspectives that are emerging in the world of work” while reminding the letter’s audience that it’s important to remember that the Church has always encouraged labor unions (no. 64).

Chapter Organization

This chapter summarizes the major arguments of each of the four selected communitarian texts and then moves into a dialogue of major common concepts found in these writings. These concepts are not only essential to understanding the arguments of the communitarian critique, but also to understanding subsequent chapters in which the concepts resurface to demonstrate that Ratzinger is in dialogue with the same issues and, in many cases, is taking a communitarian position as he seeks to engage the modern and post-modern worlds. In short, this chapter serves as the measuring stick to evaluate key events at the peak of Ratzinger's career. These topics also resurface in the analysis chapter of this project to determine where Ratzinger falls within this communitarian dialogue and Catholic communitarian-spirited sentiments.

The Basic Arguments

MacIntyre: Unity, Narrative, and Moral Disorder

In *After Virtue* (1981), Alasdair MacIntyre argues that contemporary moral language has reached a state of disorder due to a loss of common language and history that stems from two related subjects—emotivism and the democratized self born out of the Enlightenment and its intellectual successors—replacing objective standards with the expression of individual preferences. MacIntyre argues that this post-modern self began when the Enlightenment replaced the Aristotelian notion of *man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-essential-nature* (and, later, the medieval addition of *telos* to this phrase) with the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century sovereign emotivist individualism, which

seeks nothing more than survival and circumventing perceived manipulation by authority. As a result, various virtues—one could argue Aristotelian virtue as derived from the *Nicomachean Ethics*, which is also found in theistic variations in Christianity, Islam, and Judaism—are now lost.

These lost virtues, or standards, often are “found” embedded and reflected in a culture’s stories and common language. The characters within these narratives find their roles fixed and defined, and the characters serve as contributors to a larger living-and-breathing communal organism. The absence of *characters* in the post-Enlightenment world brought on a purging of the critical criteria and expectations that once provided a cohesive and equitable background for setting societal expectations and diffusing disputes. Identifying, or creating, a source for conflict resolution is particularly important among pluralistic sets of first principles, which appear no better or worse than one another. One way to bring these pluralistic viewpoints into conversation is through narrative, for it places members of a community into the stories of others, thereby creating a sense of obligation and, ultimately, a unity that buffers the pure individualistically driven self. The most ironic part of *After Virtue* is the absence of a head-on examination of pluralism, though pluralism is part of the very issue MacIntyre grapples with: How to make divergent opinions commensurable, or, rather, how to reduce or eliminate incommensurable and ever-changing perspectives? While this may not be his intention, the narrative method overlays homogeneity upon values and purposes, which in the end addresses the subject of pluralism.

Pluralism also has to be reconciled with history and context. If these are recognized as factors for consideration in the deliberative state, then this encourages

critical reflection on one's predecessors and further supports the idea that one's history—whether composed of scientific or moral language—cannot simply be tossed out and rewritten. This premise is advanced from the very outset of *After Virtue* as MacIntyre asks his readers to imagine a world in which all recorded scientific knowledge has been lost; he then asks readers to consider the same scenario for the arena of moral language and the Western philosophic tradition that informs choices. Recognition of the past allows the virtues presented by the ancients to stand; however, there is a paradox—how are humans to import these virtues, if say, for example, virtue as Aristotle understood it was set within the intellectual context of ancient Greece? To adjust for this, MacIntyre must believe in some sort of objective, divine understanding of moral language that descends upon man through language relevant to a particular time. The general concepts of a book such as the *Nicomachean Ethics* can stand (i.e., virtue, contemplation, happiness as it relates to contemplation), but they must find a new home among new narratives and characters for a particular time and culture.

Sandel: Reflection, Identity, and Language

In *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (1982), Michael Sandel challenges deontological liberals such as Rawls and Kant by taking issue with their conception of the insulated and autonomous person, exposing their failure to account for the relationship individuals hold to their group and how this might impact their actions. Sandel's *Liberalism* also questions the priority Rawls and Kant give to "right over the good" (*LLJ*, 177). One problem with Kantian philosophy, though there are many that Sandel reveals, is that it begets a paradigm or society with a winner-take-all environment "where some

were coerced by the values of others, rather than one where the needs of each harmonized with the ends of all” (*LLJ*, 5). In such a society in which the primacy of rights acts as the driver for individual deliberation, there is skepticism that the common good or interests of others will be taken into account. Instead, as the various proposals in the marketplace of ideas are considered, there is a very good chance that individuals will simply choose the option most familiar to them. Sandel views this as a “sociological objection” to the Kantian view and argues that deontological liberalism only “affirms individualistic values while pretending to hold a position of neutrality which can never be achieved” (*LLJ*, 11).

Sandel argues that if humans are composed of combinations of experiences and who, as a result, have great difficulty in reaching any sort of transcendental “standing outside of society or experience” to make claims of objectivity, then sufficient reflection and deliberation cannot be as distant as proposed by Rawls (*LLJ*, 11). Sandel’s charge against this false neutrality is particularly important because it points to a naiveté in deontological liberalism and to why communitarians are asking for something more specific. The value-sterile position advanced by Rawls and others is seen as unrealistic and discouraging of even the state from embarking on an accountable level of reflection.

Taylor: Primacy of Rights, Potential and Obligations, and Human Insufficiency

Charles Taylor’s essay, “Atomism” (1979), takes on the doctrines of social contract theory generated in the seventeenth century, namely, those of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, as well as their successors. These doctrines narrowly focus on the primacy of rights and attribute human success and fulfillment to lone individual efforts. Taylor argues that the political structures that stand today were inherited from atomists

who justified them through the primacy of rights (Atomism, 39). The concept of primacy of rights also is part of the criticism aimed at Rawls, though Taylor's essay is positioned as a reaction to Robert Nozick's *Anarchy*, which Taylor believes took primacy of certain individual rights to an extreme by using this primacy as a fundamental and conditional principle of libertarian political theory while denying the same rank to belonging and obligation (Atomism, 40). For Taylor, the flaw in this is that the freedoms that Nozick and others in the libertarian spirit ascribe to the primacy of rights doctrine overlook the relationship among freedom, obligation, and fulfillment of potential among humans and other sentient beings. Freedoms can only be sustained through societal obligations to maintain the structures that protect these freedoms.

Central to Taylor's argument is the acceptance as established principle of the Aristotelian notion of innate human insufficiency—no individual person could survive alone, or at least not for long and in a meaningful condition. There is little room to dispute this. To take survival a step further, Taylor advances this line of thought to cultivation, resembling Aristotle's concept that humans ought to design a society in which potentials can be achieved. There are no natural conditions that allow humans to do this alone. At the very least, humans are connected through generations, and as such, this renders a great natural and ethical obligation to share this benefit of generational luxuries with their contemporaries and legacies. There is no exemption from this duty, as the next person's future and equality of opportunity is dependent on the commitment of his/her predecessors.

In regard to Taylor's discussion on social contractors, Locke and Hobbes are his focus, though one could argue that Rousseau's attitude toward the necessity of a polity

deserves more attention, particularly its echo of Nozick's minimalist state and Rousseau's concerns over governmental encroachment. Rousseau is important to note for this research project since his notion of a "general will" shows that social contractors were not completely devoid of commentary on the common good. He saw the need for individuals to submit their will for the good of the whole; however, Rousseau's tone is one of resignation to this submission.²⁰ However, he is difficult to integrate into this discussion as either an ally or foe of the atomistic self and other parts of the communitarian critique. While Rousseau saw humans as happy in their natural isolated state, he was deeply concerned about how to sustain virtuous citizens, which can be seen in his own attacks on the Enlightenment in his *First Discourse*. His *Second Discourse* explored the power of language as a necessity for civilizing humans after leaving the state of nature, a view which draws him closer to the likes of MacIntyre. Complexities such as these make it difficult for Rousseau to be a direct target like Locke, although his attitude toward the preservation of the individual plays along the perimeter of this discussion. Nonetheless, when reading Taylor's essay it should be remembered that he is primarily writing about Locke and Hobbes.

²⁰ For example, in the *Social Contract*, Rousseau saw man as unnaturally situated in the constraints of government and civilization (Book I, ch. i), yet he recognized that some sort of social compact is necessary to protect humans and their common interests. Rousseau's notion of the general will—the result achieved by popular sovereignty is the only legitimate form of government (Book I, Ch. vi)—is his method of defining and achieving a common good. Without the consent of the general will, obeying the law is a begrudging surrender since it is neither natural nor logical. In Rousseau's words: "To renounce one's freedom is to renounce one's status as a man, the rights of humanity and even its duties" (Book I, Ch. iv). His solution to this was the idea that through the general will individuals transfer their interests, including their will, to those of the whole with the expectation that their right to consent and agreement will always be preserved.

Walzer: Particularism, Self-Respect, and Distribution of Social Goods

Michael Walzer's *Spheres of Justice* (1983) can be viewed as an intimate response to Nozick—the two co-taught a class together in 1970–1971 on “Capitalism and Socialism.” One result of this co-teaching experience was *Spheres*, making it not a detailed response to Nozick's *Anarchy*, but rather a reaction to and dialogue about Nozick's philosophic approach in general. Rawls looms in the background as Walzer notes in his Acknowledgments that his work mostly disagrees with *A Theory of Justice*.²¹ *Spheres* puts forth a distributive system of justice to temper the extremely liberal, laissez-faire approach to power acquisition that tends to arise in liberal democracies. Walzer's primary desire is to remove domination in hopes that this will produce political egalitarianism in society. His counter to the liberal individualism of Rawls and Nozick is best understood through the distribution of justice and power he proposes be set into motion through complex equality—the spheres of powers.

His argument is self-described as “radically particularist” (*SOJ*, xiv), and, like Sandel, he pro-actively avoids the use of hypotheticals. Instead, Walzer uses historical and contemporary issues as part of his anthropological defense. For him, the meaning of social goods—including justice—changes over time and means different things to different groups in different places. One way to look at his conception of justice is that goods should be distributed through silos, whereby injustice only occurs when one group attempts to control another silo. “Silo” seems more appropriate than spheres since the concept of spheres carries with it the possibility of overlap, especially in political discussions, and if the intent is truly to thwart tyrants who wish to conquer more than

²¹ See p. xviii in *Spheres of Justice*.

their designated, silo'd industry. Silos of power are demarcated with clear boundaries; transgression of another silo should be considered a reproachable breach and an act of tyranny. The silos are created by identifying the social goods most important to a particular society. This system is not perfect, as groups can dominate within each silo/sphere, but at least their domination is limited. The larger-scaled dependency between silos/spheres also serves as a model to influence micro-level behaviors where domination could occur.

Communitarian Concepts for Dialogue

Human Nature, Freedom, and Potential

Several communitarians envision character molding and caretaking as necessary activities for people to both thrive at a meaningful level of existence and perfect the human condition. Taylor believes that in the natural state humans are insufficiently equipped for survival, so the creation of government—and one with a sense of obligation—is essential to both realizing humans' fullest potential and protecting their freedoms. MacIntyre regards individuals as works-in-progress in need of external guidance and an accessible set of stories that foster virtuous attributes, which, in turn, help humans reach their ends. Walzer sees a hypercompetitive disposition in humans to dominate others and believes that one way to curb this is by distributing power in a way that creates limited autonomy. To help sustain this distributive system, Walzer is a proponent of cultivating a sense of self-respect within individuals so they do not act out of insecurity and extend their reach into another silo of power. This infers a dual aspect

of human insufficiency: if left alone, humans will inevitably undermine themselves and others, but the human condition is improvable, and, in this case, insecurity can be transitioned into self-respect.

Taylor begins with the common Aristotelian declaration that man is a social and political animal incapable of self-sufficiency outside of a polis (Atomism, 41). Even social contract theorists—the atomists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that Taylor critiques—saw a similar insufficiency in terms of humans and survivalism. As evidence, Taylor turns to Hobbes, reminding us that this political philosopher and other social contract theorists of the time believed that the state of nature left man with a life that was “nasty, brutish, and short,” and that they “stressed the great and irresistible advantages that men gained from entering society” (Atomism, 42).²² Taylor therefore uses both perspectives—the motivations of contract theorists and those founded in the Aristotelian view of nature—to take the next logical step and conclude that society is needed not only for survival but also to develop the talents of humans (Atomism, 42). To take Taylor’s argument seriously, one must accept that humans possess potential. To fulfill this potential, humans should have the protections of a political infrastructure to guarantee that they can make choices on a less-inhibited path to pursuing their ends. To sustain this system over time, a natural civic duty is required: humans are obligated to keep a non-prohibitive climate intact for their contemporaries and the generations that

²² Taylor, “Atomism,” 42. The first part of this quote (“nasty, brutish, and short”) is no doubt a reference to the passage from Hobbes’s *Leviathan* that states that life before society was “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short” (*Leviathan*, Part I, chapter 13, paragraph 12). It’s interesting to note that Taylor removed the “solitary” portion from the original phrase. Perhaps this is so other social contract theorists could fit this category, or perhaps “solitary” spoke to a natural inclination that Hobbes saw in humans as individualistic, solitary creatures, which is antagonistic to the communitarian view of human nature’s need for cooperation.

follow. Taylor says the trouble for the “ultra-liberal” perspective—one could also interpret this as libertarian since the most direct target in Taylor’s essay is Nozick—is a “fear that the affirming of any obligations will offer a pretext for the restriction of freedom” (*Atomism*, 48).

Here, Taylor reveals a peculiar insecurity in Nozick’s work, namely, a great unwillingness to subscribe to the virtue of humility. Nozick’s argument is that compulsory decrees are a violation of individual freedoms. Even taxation by extension falls into this charge. Nozick writes: “Taxation of earnings from labor is on par with forced labor” (*ASU*, 169). Those compelled to act for others become victims, according Nozick: “Peaceful individuals minding their own business are not violating the rights of others” (*ASU*, 52). Nozick overlooks the social contract aspect of the protections made possible by the state if one is participating in society. Certainly, someone paved the way for the society one lives in now, so there are benefits and privileges one receives without payment. One way to pay these benefits and privileges back is by leaving the same conditions so the next group can prosper. If individuals accept that their success is not entirely their own doing—surely, groundwork was laid to allow their labor to produce results of some sort—they will recognize a civic duty tantamount to protective rights. This is not to argue that Nozick does not also recognize some level of wickedness in the state of nature, but it is with great reluctance that he does so, dragging the polity through refutations of protective associations before arriving at the minimal night-watchman state, whose reach is narrowed “to protecting persons against murder, assault, theft, fraud, and so forth” (*ASU*, 162). For Nozick, the state is inevitable rather than essential and simply comes into being through the “invisible-hand process” (*ASU*, 18–22).

In reading Nozick, it seems that he wants to believe humans can thrive without the force of government, but he eventually concedes to a severely limited model based on protections and endless contract exchanges without foresight and deference to specialty. At some point, one has to recognize the expertise of others to carry on activities on their behalf: How ought humans devise a fair and effective education system? What is the best approach for planning sustainable cities? What safeguards are necessary for protecting the health of the people? All of these are activities that will need to be run by the state since they protect the public, require taxation to fund, and help maintain the general security and welfare of the state's citizens, and, ultimately, the fulfillment of potentials and ends.

Similar to Taylor's obligation-potential linkage, MacIntyre sees humans as part of a developing process who are in need of external guidance and whose true ends are not achieved in the temporal world. Without virtue, the modern self no longer has an end: "the peculiarly modern self, the emotivist self, in acquiring sovereignty in its own realm lost its traditional boundaries provided by a social identity and a view of human life as ordered to a given end" (AV, 34). Hence, moral language finds itself in great disorder. The study of ethics and proper reasoning fills this void, guiding one's ordering of desires and emotions so that habits of action can transform human nature as it is into something that it could be—*human-nature-as-it-could-be-if-it-realized-its-telos* (AV, 52–53). This places the tenets of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*—the distinction between *man-as-he-happens-to-be* and *man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-essential-nature*—within the framework of a society constructed to help individuals fulfill their potentials, or *telos*. While it can become intricate to complete this integration, MacIntyre believes it can be

done and without alteration to “theistic beliefs, whether Christian, as with Aquinas, or Jewish with Maimonides, or Islamic with Ibn Roschd.” MacIntyre sees this as a synthesis between virtue and vice, and between sin and Aristotle’s concept of error (*AV*, 53).

Walzer’s distributive system of power is a statement on human nature since his general premise for segmenting power is that distribution is the source of all social conflicts. In reading Walzer, one takes away that he is asserting that competing factions are perennially at war to determine distribution of goods (land, capital, technical skills and assets, education, and so forth). Domination, therefore, is inevitable: “[s]ome group of men and women—class, caste, strata, estate, alliance, or social formation—comes to enjoy a monopoly or a near monopoly of some dominant good; or, a coalition of groups comes to enjoy, and so on” (*SOJ*, 12). Excessive accumulation of wealth is also suspect if it is built up to fund efforts to intrude upon other spheres. To remedy this, power should be distributed across spheres, segments, or, more aptly described, silos. Walzer refers to this as complex equality, the opposite of tyranny. By distributing social goods and responsibilities, one group or individual will find it difficult to dominate all aspects. As Walzer, puts it: “Good fences make just societies” (*SOJ*, 319).

For Walzer, human nature is improvable through education, particularly the development of self-respect. He arrives at cultivating self-respect after contemplating how one will successfully keep persons at bay in a distributive system of justice. What will prevent individuals from intruding upon others? What motivates intrusion? Since Walzer sees domination as the ugly side of human nature, one must infer there is an insecurity bubbling up in individuals that drives them to acquire more than their fair share of power, resources, or social-political-economic standing. Self-respect can suppress this

urge. Autonomy, however, is not entirely lost in this distributive system: individuals can exercise autonomy by advancing through their sphere. There is also an element of reciprocity in regard to self-respect. It depends on “one’s character, qualities, and actions” as well as a connection to the group, which, in turn, makes individuals not only responsible to themselves but to their “fellow citizens” (*SOJ*, 278–279). Self-respecting persons are autonomous in that they are voluntarily participating members who know when to limit their power and not hold “claims [on] other goods...not earned, to which [they have] no right,” as such is the behavior of a tyrant, who is the very opposite of the self-respecting person (*SOJ*, 279). Again, autonomy of the spheres is essential—this is a foil to the overambitious individual who would become a tyrant. Such individuals may dominate their sphere, but it will only be their sphere. Domination and injustice occur when these individuals breach their sphere. To reiterate: self-respect is one check that Walzer hopes will overcome the natural ambition of humans to dominate. The inference here is that some acts of domination are driven by fear, lack of self-esteem, or a general feeling that control and autonomy are up for grabs.

Challenge to Autonomy

Both MacIntyre and Sandel question the level of autonomy that Rawls ascribes to the hypothetical self. These two writers argue that what actually happens in the original position is a re-affirmation of values already embedded in the self, rather than the selection of just principles from a transcendental place that allows the self to objectively identify the issue and value at hand. By removing the particulars of the situations, the self is left with nothing other than what was brought to the examination initially. Taylor takes

a similar opposition to autonomy, questioning why moderns made the leap from natural property rights to primacy of rights in general, leaving behind the notion of insufficiency. Taylor's assessment—and claims by other communitarians against Rawls, and especially Nozick—points to a fundamental insecurity in humans and an absence of humility in the emotivist/modern/post-modern self.

The emotivist self that MacIntyre describes is the sovereign being who desires to be free from hierarchy and teleology (AV, 62). This individual is an “autonomous moral agent” who wishes not to be manipulated, and, paradoxically, finds no other way to do this than “by directing towards others those very manipulative modes of relationship which each of us aspires to resist in our own case” (AV, 68). The self is valued above all else, especially authority and, tangentially by result, community and responsibility. MacIntyre sees this type of individualism as contradictory and an “incoherent conceptual scheme which we have inherited” (AV, 68). This flawed inheritance contributes to the disorder of moral language he sees in the world.

The modern self, the emotivist, finds no limit on that which he or she can pass judgment and feels free to criticize “from whatever standpoint the self has adopted, including the self's choice of standpoint to adopt” (AV, 31), rendering one's own positions moot for further explanation. It is under this framework that emotivists undermine even their own position. At times, MacIntyre's description of emotivism sounds like a repackaged version of relativism. For example, he writes: “[T]here are and can be no valid rational justifications for any claims that objective and impersonal moral standards exist and hence that there are no such standards” (AV, 19).

While emotivism claims to be a system for moral judgment based on the meaning of sentences, it ends up producing judgments based merely on the expression of one's attitudes and preferences (AV, 13). Thus, its process is circular, non-reflective, and simply dependent on itself. Each individual, believing that every attempt to "provide a rational justification for an objective morality has in fact failed," adopts his or her own first principles by choice, unguided by any criteria (AV, 19–20). The connection one must make here is that through the Enlightenment's disentanglement of the individual's will from hierarchy and obligation, modern individuals feel further emboldened and qualified to make these claims. They operate under the illusion of free will and select an embedded, socialized preference that in many cases is simply drawn from a set of limited choices. It's not clear which came first here—the release from authority or the spread of emotivism—but, nonetheless, moral judgments become the carriers of a great deal of arbitrariness.

Sandel takes a position similar to that of MacIntyre in regard to the failure of autonomy and individual choice when he concludes that distant reflection is a source of error. Sandel argues that agents believe they actually decide what they want most, assessing their preferences and reaffirming something already there, which Sandel calls "pre-existing desires" and a complete façade for any "voluntarist aspect of agency" in the original position (*LLJ*, 162). So, behind the veil of ignorance, there is little reflection, choices have been pre-determined, and ends are simply matched against "pre-existing desires, undifferentiated as to worth, with the best available means of satisfying them" (*LLJ*, 178). In other words, there is no validation or contemplation of a conception of the good or higher values with the Rawlsian model. One danger that Sandel identifies with

this is that such “co-operative virtues” as altruism and benevolence are “least likely to flourish in a society founded on individualistic assumptions” (*LLJ*, 11). This explains Sandel’s call for proper reflection and not simply “superficial introspection, just ‘inward’ enough to survey uncritically the motives and desires with which the accidents of my circumstance have left me” (*LLJ*, 163). A sense of inner discovery is lost with Rawls if we are to merely view man as a being “who chooses his ends rather than a being, as the ancients conceived him, who discovers his ends for conditions of self-knowledge” (*LLJ*, 22). Sandel wants something more.

Sandel also challenges autonomy by pointing out the intricacies in identity formation and the self’s connections to community that follow. Overlapping circles of identity and influence bind and limit an individual’s motivations and acceptable choices. Identities take the form of memberships in family, a particular community, or a nation or people that share a history. The choices produced on account of these memberships are more than “natural duties” individuals owe their fellow humans or even agreements—they are actually products of the “enduring attachments and commitments which taken together partly define the person” (*LLJ*, 179).

Sandel charges that Rawls’s self is so independent that “it rules out the possibility that common purposes and ends could inspire more or less expansive self-understandings.” These shared aspirations are obscured by Rawls’s failure to see what Sandel calls “intersubjective” and “intrasubjective” forms of self-understanding. By intersubjective, Sandel means that at times the self will embrace more than a single identity and its contingent obligations to family, community, class, or nation. By intrasubjective, he means that there are times when one refers to a “plurality of selves

within a single, individual human being, as when we account for inner deliberation in terms of the pull of competing identities” (*LLJ*, 62–63).

Taylor addresses false autonomy on the historical-philosophical front. He is perplexed at the elevation of the primacy of rights, arguing that in “an earlier phase of Western civilization...these arguments would have seemed wildly eccentric and implausible” (*Atomism*, 41). Taylor’s purpose in his essay is to explore how this situation came to be and offer a refutation by rethinking the human condition’s obligations that sustain and make individual rights possible. Atomism fostered this elevation of the primacy of rights through its view of human nature, which asserts that man/woman alone is indeed self-sufficient through the goods he/she is able to obtain independently by mixing labor with unacquired resources, but the force of law is needed to protect this natural right. By protecting this natural right, individual rights are ascribed primacy. One can see this view stems from Locke’s *Second Treatise*, but it is curious how Taylor links this view to Hobbes since in his essay Taylor also connects Hobbes’s view on the chaos of nature to Hobbes’s justification for society. Nevertheless, the concept of atomism still sustains its general premise of self-sufficiency, which Taylor sees as part of “a very questionable thesis” (*Atomism*, 41). He never uses the word “humility,” nor do any of the communitarians who write in reaction to Rawls and Nozick, but it is a broad umbrella under which to place liberal entitlement and is certainly an underlying charge that should have been levied against atomists and the like—why has individual pride reached such heights in modern and post-modern humanity where humbleness has vanished? The closest one might reach this is in MacIntyre’s discussion of virtue pursuit.

Primacy of History, Particularism, and Anti-Hypotheticals

Sandel and Walzer provide two different accounts of how history matters, advancing particularist and anti-hypothetical stances in contrast to Rawls. For Sandel, the lack of close reflection prevents individuals from really understanding themselves and their relation to their community and how this influences their internal decision-making process in the original position. For Walzer, distributive justice is anchored in the meanings of social goods, membership requirements, and the boundaries of power segmentation, which are based on cultural circumstances.

According to Sandel, just as the original position lacks an account of how the individual understands him/herself in relation to personal experiences and community, it similarly fails to account for the socialization embedded in individuals that originates from the historical context in which they live and the connections they form in their world. Men and women can reflect on their history and attempt to distance their view, “but the distance is always precarious and provisional...never finally secured outside the history itself” (*LLJ*, 179). It’s not clear if Sandel classifies this as insurmountable, but it looks challenging for the Rawlsian creature.

Walzer makes clear from the very start that he intends to stay away from abstractions as much as possible, for in the abstracted plateau everyone agrees but particulars produce different choices. It is myopic to take seriously the outlook that humans can “choose impartially, knowing nothing of their own situation, barred from making particularist claims, confronting an abstract set of goods.” Walzer wants to know how individuals make choices in front of a backdrop of shared culture and understandings (*SOJ*, 5).

For Walzer, justice is conditional, a human construction, so he doubts there can be only one way to approach it. *Spheres*'s theory of justice is directed toward social goods. In his six principles of justice, the particularist dependencies of distributive justice are seen in pluralistic terms, including objects in some cultures carry sentiments; men and women have distinct and defined identities because of the way they use social goods, as well as the way they stand in relation to others; there are different goods from one civilization to another, whether moral or material; the distribution of goods is relative to social meanings and the goods themselves; the meaning of just and unjust distributions changes over time; and what happens within one distributive arena can affect what happens in others, so there is only relative autonomy within each sphere (*SOJ*, 7–10). These six principles provide tangible criteria for determining justice within a certain society at a given period of time. One could argue that Walzer constructed a complex system for relativism, leaving objectivity behind.

The basis for goods dispersion, like Walzer's circumvention of universalism, must be based on a particular social world, not, as he calls it, "an ideal map or master plan but, rather, a map and a plan appropriate to the people for whom it is drawn, whose common life it reflects" (*SOJ*, 26). The boundaries are derived from shared social meanings in language, culture, and history and demarcate what cannot be transgressed. They can also be drawn by membership, which possesses a political-historical component in how a community is constituted, taking into account choices and existing membership distributions from "existing contacts, connections, alliances" and the effects the group has beyond its borders (*SOJ*, 31–32).

Communities are strong when anchored in a culture that explains boundaries, but these stories, like boundaries, can shift. Community is a good in and of itself, arguably the most important one. It infers membership, whether official or implied, and is “a good that can only be distributed by taking people in,” physically and politically (*SOJ*, 29).

The precise structure of community can come in the form of culture, religion, or politics and is determined by what is necessary for the group’s “common life” and a feeling that the contract is about more than simply “mutual aid.” Therefore, the needs a community satisfies are as the members understand those needs. Membership then not only provides general security and welfare, it also distinguishes between members and strangers (*SOJ*, 64–65). In recognizing this history, individuals recognize that by joining a group they must remember what circumstances drove their membership, re-enforcing the idea that the community is more than just rights but also responsibilities to fulfill the original intent of the collective vision. In other words, the existence of the community precedes the individual and its scope exceeds the individual’s immediate interests and concerns.

The Power of Narrative and Language

Narrative and the meaning of language are closely related to the importance of history, as they provide the social context and characters in which one makes sense of things. This is primarily linked to MacIntyre, though Sandel also offers insights on the power of language in creating a shared vision within a community.

For MacIntyre, narrative is a natural method for learning, as it is a process that humans are predisposed to use to make sense of the world: “we all live our narratives in

our lives and [it is] because we understand our own lives in terms of the narratives that we live out that the form of narrative is appropriate for understanding the actions of others” (AV, 212). History demonstrates the utility of stories. MacIntyre cites ancient Greece, the medieval era, and the Renaissance as eras that used stories as the “chief means of moral education.” The same applied in areas in which religion prevailed, be that Christianity, Judaism, or Islam (AV, 121). Through narrative, one becomes locked into the stories of others, creating obligations and commitments:

I am not only accountable, I am one who can always ask others for an account, who can put others to the question. I am part of their story, as they are part of mine. The narrative of any one life is part of an interlocking set of narratives (AV, 218).

The idea here is that stories provide common criteria that allow people to make sounder moral judgments since they are tied to some network of roles, purposes, ends, and character. The characters in the narrative form play an important role: “a *character* is an object of regard by the members of the culture generally or by some significant segment of them” who “furnishes them with a cultural and moral ideal” and “morally legitimates a mode of social existence” (AV, 29). Characters provide “those social roles which provide a culture with its moral definitions” (AV, 31). Characters create the common criteria to resolve disagreements regarding morality; they do not deploy moral beliefs. One weakness of MacIntyre’s argument about which the reader should ask: Has he simply replaced first principles with the acceptance of narrative? Either way, characters and their particular meanings are a part of the common language that have been lost.

Just as narrative and the meaning of language reveal the false promise of the sterile original position by showing how morality and judgment become connected in a

culture's common stories, they also serve as preventatives from treating philosophy at large as a contributing factor to an objective discussion. MacIntyre gives pause to the idea that philosophies from different eras can be treated as participants in the same dialogue. Specifically, he takes issue with the idea that moral philosophers such as Plato, Hume, Mill, and even the reader can be treated as contemporaries. By placing them in the same dialogue, one abstracts "these writers from the cultural and social milieus in which they lived and thought and so the history of their thought acquires a false independence from the rest of the culture" (AV, 11).

The most peculiar part of MacIntyre's argument is how he connects the narrative approach to Aristotelian virtue. One could argue: Why not simply ask that the works of Aristotle be read to produce more virtuous citizens? This is most likely because, as just noted, MacIntyre sees how context matters, as it sets a common ground and parameters for parties to negotiate.

Sandel looks to language and vocabulary as a means to strengthen community. A healthy community:

is not merely a spirit of benevolence, or the prevalence of communitarian values, or even certain "shared final ends" alone, but a common vocabulary of discourse and a background of implicit practices and understandings within which the opacity of the participants is reduced if never finally dissolved.

Here, Sandel takes a step back from the view that "shared final ends" are a centerpiece to the traditional communitarian ideology to insist that humans cannot even reach this stage if they cannot reach a consensus on, or at least take steps toward, understanding a culture's common definitions. This could be both moral as well as institutional since Sandel sees a strong community as "constitutive of the shared understandings of the

participants and embodied in their institutional arrangements, not simply an attribute of certain of the participants' plans of life" (*LLJ*, 172–173). In other words, part of the strength of the political apparatus rests on is the citizens' understanding of it.

Critical Vision of the Enlightenment

Some communitarians pinpoint the Enlightenment as the source of the errors they find with Rawls and the new liberal self—its misguided individualistic aims that neglect the common good and its vague hypothetical state that disregards identity and the influence of community and obligations. For MacIntyre, the Enlightenment led to the emotivist self, who falsely believes it can forgo generations of thought development and the experiences of its predecessors. This idea that history and context do not matter finds its origin in the Enlightenment and its thinkers, who inferred that philosophers from all time periods could be treated as contemporaries engaging in the same dialogue, which MacIntyre also refutes. Sandel's criticism hones in on the hypothetical tone of contract theory and its voluntaristic nature, which we can connect through inference to the Enlightenment and modernity.

As noted, for MacIntyre, the Enlightenment was the beginning of the emotivist self's tendency to evade basic logic and history. Since the Enlightenment was an era that emphasized the collection and development of knowledge, this is an ironic contradiction to have been spawned from the period. In the opening of *After Virtue*, MacIntyre calls on his readers to imagine a world from which all scientific knowledge has been lost. He then asks readers to imagine this same scenario applied to the world of moral language and

Western philosophy.²³ In the case of science, the world is led astray because its great collections of data and the established scientific standards that once existed are reduced to fragments and informal, verbal understandings of the general principles once verified and accepted by communities of experts. In the case of philosophy, contemporary, individualistic political units now see themselves as autonomous in the individual decision-making process, free from the development and history of philosophy. Using this parallel, MacIntyre believes the Enlightenment failed because Kierkegaard, Kant, Diderot, Hume, Smith, and similar contemporaries from this era constructed arguments regarding authority and moral rules and precepts from premises on “human nature as they understood it to be,” but failed to see how their own positions may have been connected to, or at least should have been spoken to, “in light of their own history” (AV, 52). It is easy to see why, from this historical oversight, MacIntyre views the narrative as a way to find common ground in the contemporary world to resolve its own tensions, since narrative accounts for history and how it shapes moral judgments. The Enlightenment not only pushed stories to the side, but also classical virtue, which explains MacIntyre’s hope that the Aristotelian tradition can be restored in today’s world.

Sandel does not take direct issue with the Enlightenment but is very critical of one of its legacies, the elevation of contract theory. He categorizes Rawls’s theory of justice as general contract theory, a hypothetical situation in which groups determine what is just and unjust, which can be traced back to Locke, Rousseau, and Kant. Since there is no real contract, and, secondly, since choices have already been made (i.e., established law,

²³ See chapter 1, “A Disquieting Suggestion” in *After Virtue*.

culture, identities, communities, etc.) Rawls's theory becomes painfully hypothetical. In one of Sandel's most aggressive passages he writes:

Not only did his contract never really happen; it is imagined to take place among the sorts of beings who never really existed, that is, being struck with the kind of complicated amnesia necessary to the veil of ignorance (*LLJ*, 105).

Since there is no real contract, there is neither a call to a higher good nor even a sense of reciprocity. The contract is nothing more than an act of autonomy and will. Rawls's contract either assumes reciprocity will be achieved, or he has taken for granted what humans might succumb to in a free-for-all of contracting. Justice then becomes, in a sense, individual obligation created through a contract. As Sandel sees it, Rawls's conception of justice is too voluntaristic—just behavior is for humans to choose, not a requirement or responsibility. One must recognize the irony in Sandel's assertion here, for while he claims that justice is too voluntaristic he also argues that behind the veil of ignorance one is matching a potential choice of ends against one's pre-existing desires, which previously inferred no such choice existed.

Sandel's critique of Rawls is heavy on contract theory, and through this, reveals some thoughts on objective-subjective matters. He sees contracts as a matter of philosophy of law that originates from first principles. Contracts are dependent on and attached to prior agreements, just as laws are backed by legislation. As such, further questions regarding the origins of each arrangement can never end until an arrangement eventually reaches some first principle, which in most cases finds its origins in social contracts, which Sandel notes as either appealing to natural law or the "law of God and Nature." Rawls fails to accommodate for this, and Sandel says that Rawls is unable to rely on either of these appeals since "'the law of God and Nature' involves a more

substantial theological and metaphysical commitment than Rawls is prepared to assume” (*LLJ*, 115–116). One is then left to wonder: How will agreement ever be met in the original position?

Responsibilities and Obligations

An overarching theme that emerges when all of these common communitarian concepts are taken in the aggregate is the implication these concepts have for human behavior and motivations. What will development of virtue yield? If humans are bounded by narrative, what improvements can we expect? How can obligations be seen as compulsory? Sandel’s aforementioned contract theory demonstrates the impractical nature of navigating through life’s many relationships via contract reliance. Walzer’s vision is less about deriving a system to which to attach feelings of responsibility and obligation than it is about curbing the innate human trait of dominance—an opposition to benevolent behavior—through a system of distributive justice and power segmentation. Taylor and MacIntyre are the most explicit in illuminating the relationship between community and responsibility without compromise to individual rights. Taylor’s three-part connection involving freedom, obligation, and potential points to some of the limitations of the autonomous self and the libertarian disregard for generational luxury. MacIntyre’s call for narrative clearly shows the relationship among virtue and obligation, responsibility, and accountability. In some ways, this final theme of responsibility and obligation is the end product of communitarian theory.

Taylor argues there are many obligations that even proponents of primacy of rights would acknowledge, such as the “involuntary associations” between generations,

specifically those of parents and children (Atomism, 54–55). This can also be applied at a societal level since future generations will need today’s civilization to reach their aspirations. Therefore, Taylor says that if we have benefited from these associations and “have been enabled to become free agents ourselves,” one has a compelling obligation to make the same opportunities available to others (Atomism, 57). In short, anyone who has benefited from the privilege of generational luxury has an obligation to provide the same for future generations. Taylor’s usage of “free agents” marks the beginning of an argument that ties freedom (individual autonomy) into the concept of responsibility.

Taylor sees freedom and culture as intertwined subjects, and it is uncertain which comes first, hence his debate with primacy of rights, but this does not reject the concept of autonomy altogether. “If realizing our freedom partly depends on the society and culture in which we live, then we exercise a fuller freedom if we can help determine the shape of this society and culture” (Atomism, 59). Taylor is not suggesting an authoritarian approach to either restrict autonomy or use it as the instrument to disperse freedom. Rather, there is a symbiotic relationship. The ultimate form of autonomy, self-understanding, is “partly defined in conversation with others or through the common understanding which underlies the practices of our society” (Atomism, 60). The flat, hypothetical self in the works of Rawls and Nozick provides far too little accommodation of identity, a non-natural and conditional element of human agency.

For MacIntyre, narrative provides the guiding light for accountability and responsibility: “to be the subject of a narrative that runs from one’s birth to one’s death is...to be accountable for the actions and experiences which compose a narratable life” (AV, 217). At a base level, MacIntyre hopes that this sense of responsibility will result in

unity. As individuals build their own stories within a larger narrative, this requires each individual's own self-interest to be a part of the larger narrative. However, how does one encourage such altruistic behavior, without simply making the group interest a new self-motivated interest?

MacIntyre's answer suggests that virtue is part of the answer to this question since virtue itself—in the sense of perfecting one's self—should be the ultimate end for one's life. For MacIntyre, it is a return to Aristotle, whose teachings were lost after the Enlightenment. Humans would be better served using reason to instruct rather than a specific end or value when thinking of the Aristotelian distinction between *man-as-he-happens-to-be* and *man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-essential-nature*. The study of ethics helps humans make this transition and reinforces the ideas of potentiality and human *telos*. The motivation for reaching potentiality is happiness. To not reach one's potential ends is to feel “frustrated and incomplete, to fail to achieve that good of rational happiness which it is peculiarly ours as a species to pursue” (AV, 52). In its simplest form, to regain a sense of accountability means to return to these classical notions and the value of virtue. For MacIntyre, this is the best way to begin encouraging responsibility.

Application of the Six Principles

In the chapters that follow, these six main principles of the communitarian critique—the insufficiency of human nature; the Enlightenment and its legacy as an origin of moral rot; a challenge to individual autonomy; responsibilities and obligations; the primacy of history, particularism, and anti-hypotheticals; and the power of narrative and language—will be used to navigate four key events and works in the career of Joseph

Ratzinger. The insufficiency of human nature and a challenge to limitless individual autonomy surface in Ratzinger's works as the sense of humility he finds through the debate between faith and reason. For Ratzinger, self-autonomy at its extreme stifles humility and moves obligation to the periphery, and responsibilities and obligation are paired with the narrative tool and the importance of language and cultural considerations. Similarly, his own criticism of the Enlightenment and subsequent re-interpretation of it, along with the re-discovery of a culture's *sense of the sacred*, speak to the primacy of history, particularism, and anti-hypotheticals. Through all of this, Ratzinger is exploring how a traditional institution such as the Church can sustain itself as a civilization changes and how citizens can be drawn to moral action as their identity becomes diluted.

Chapter 3: Faith, Reason, and Law in the Habermas Encounter

For a self totally detached from its empirically-given features would seem no more than a kind of abstract consciousness (conscious of what?), a radically situated subject given way to a radically disembodied one.

– Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*

Introduction

Humility in Universalism vs. Particularism, First Principles, and Internal Deliberation

This first event, Joseph Ratzinger's encounter with Jürgen Habermas, addresses one of the issues at the core of the rationalist debate from the communitarian critique: universalism versus particularism, which is comparable in the Ratzinger-Habermas event to objective-subjective distinctions, the inevitable relationship between faith and reason, and the subject at the heart of all of these tensions—first principles. Distinct from Ratzinger's own communitarian thought, this event demonstrates his sense of humility and the sensitive and compromising role such a sense of humility plays in circumventing obsolescence of the Church and supplementing classical philosophy. To avoid obsolescence in the secular world, faith is spoken of as a partner with reason rather than an adversary. Ratzinger's own understanding of faith possesses a sense of humility, as it is placed within a cooperative relationship with reason and described as a work in progress in need of perennial renewal, resembling MacIntyre's suggestion that the post-modern self has lost sight of virtue development and the pursuit of fulfilling human potentials. A strong grounding in faith also releases a significant part of one's self-

autonomy and recognizes a deficiency in knowledge of the whole, as deference is given to belief in a divine act experienced by others.

The parallel relationship between subjectivism and objectivism and that of reason and faith makes sense if one views revelation as a subset of objectivism. Faith is deference to broadly understood revelation in the void of rational observation and is the belief in God and revelation, inferring an acceptance of some sort of universal standards. Therefore, we can also see how this resembles the contrast between particularism and universalism, as objective claims start to look like a call for universal or natural laws, and particularist claims look like those belonging to subjectivism. In either relationship, there are occasions when concessions are made and the infallibility of autonomy is brought into question.

Some of the writers (most notably MacIntyre and Taylor) discussed in the initial communitarian critique of Rawls and Nozick trace reason's triumph over faith back to the Enlightenment. From that era forward, the elevation of individual autonomy placed moderns and post-moderns on a path that underscored the Enlightenment's emphasis on observation and the preference for reason over opinion and the metaphysical musings of anachronistic times in philosophy. The faith-reason debate calls into question the Enlightenment's removal of God and revelation in the internal reasoning process, or at the very least tolerance between the two viewpoints and whether it is prudent to falsify either. Communitarian thought, particularly the criticism of emotivism (MacIntyre) and atomism (Taylor), describes this as the subjective disorder that can exist as self-autonomy spreads throughout a citizenry and conflicting first principles meet without any broader

backdrop. This in turn leads to social disconnection and the atomized self and, eventually, to the motivation to feel a sense of obligation to one's fellow humans.

Sandel's challenge to autonomy can also be applied in this encounter as the balance between faith and reason, particularly the role that choice plays in navigating the two. Using Sandel as a lens, one can argue that as much as individuals believe they are employing a deliberate usage of faith or reason, or even a combination thereof, each merely generates choices that confirm embedded values. Neither the neutrality of reason, nor the deference to revelation plays a role in the decision-making process. However, per Sandel, one might say that revelation or any belief system (even atheism) is actually more likely to be confirmed since it is part of a socialization process by which individuals develop their core beliefs. This is one of the obstacles to Rawls's original position found in Ratzinger's encounter with Habermas. Common experiences need to be taken into consideration, as well as a rigorous level of reflection so as to step back from superficial understandings of one's self that only validate previously held values. Sandel's emphasis on non-distant reflection is one way to approach the objective and subjective secular worlds that Ratzinger and Habermas are working to reconcile. The question that arises in this reconciliation is: Where do the first principles of these competing worlds come from? In this encounter, these two worlds are represented by the devout faithful and those primarily guided by secular reason. Ratzinger views reason as the guiding hand that leads from the foremost principle, which is revelation for the faithful. His position here is consistent with previous philosophic outputs from the Church that designate the supremacy of faith and revelation over reason. Reason is represented by the dangers caused by those who believe that political decision-making absent of any higher order

and understanding of virtue can be thought of as complete. Ratzinger sees a necessary check between the two.

The importance of this event lies in more than identifying similarities between Habermas and Ratzinger, or the loose link between Habermas and communitarians since he can be perceived as a tangential ally through his own criticism of John Rawls.²⁴ This event connects two perspectives deemed mutually exclusive throughout the modern era—in this case, those of a believer and an atheist. In a similar manner, it also displays a gravitation between two poles within political philosophy—the objective and subjective. The event holds significant relevance for the field of political philosophy because the modern era has cast aside the merits of faith and providence in favor of reason, and we now have an example of two notable figures re-examining some of the outputs of modernity, namely, the West’s elevation of individual autonomy and the obsolescence of religion.

A similar discussion of faith and reason was notably framed in political philosophy by Leo Strauss as the tension between Athens (reason) and Jerusalem (revelation). Strauss put forth the idea that one should be open to both reason and faith, but the West experienced a great deal of setbacks, as the Bible and Greek philosophy were two irreconcilable codes of conduct. His solution was that the two camps needed to be open to one another in matters involving speculation since it was impossible to be both a philosopher and a theologian in the West, or a synthesis of both (1979 [1954], 111). This seems a reasonable proposition since siding with philosophy does require a certain

²⁴ See Habermas’s essays, “Reconciliation through the Public Use of Reason” and “‘Reasonable’ versus ‘True,’ or the Morality of Worldview,” in *Inclusion of the Other* (1998) These essays critique much of Rawls’s career, with particular focus on his *A Theory of Justice* and *Political Liberalism*.

level of faith. Additionally, neither approach is capable of achieving knowledge of the whole by itself—a common thread throughout much of Strauss’s work. All of this can be viewed as one—and possibly the most crucial—subject of debate in the internal deliberation in Rawls’s original position. The openness advocated in Strauss’s understanding of the Athens-Jerusalem debate is similarly mirrored in the humbleness of the checks and limitations proposed in the Habermas encounter. Ratzinger’s and Habermas’s resolution to this relationship—a reciprocal checks-and-balances affair—eventually lead to a demonstration of how religion can stabilize pluralistic societies.

Context of the Encounter

Ratzinger’s exchange with Habermas did not trigger direct, written responses; however, both speakers were called to present papers on the same topic—The Pre-Political Moral Foundations of a Free State—so the event represented an exchange in so far as they were the sole presenters, with one another in mind as a key audience. For that reason, it is preferable to call this an encounter, rather than an exchange. Both lectures were prepared in advance, and there is an instance²⁵ in which Ratzinger directly mentions he is in agreement with Habermas on the need for “self-limitation” of both sides of the faith-reason debate in post-secular society, so this may have been an on-the-spot addition made after digesting Habermas’s lecture.

Ratzinger was serving as the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith and was invited by the Catholic Academy of Bavaria, along with Habermas, to speak in

²⁵ See p. 77 of Ratzinger’s essay, “That Which Holds the World Together: The Pre-Political Moral Foundations of a Free State,” in *The Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion* (2005 [2007]).

Munich on January 19, 2004. Habermas, widely known as antagonistic toward religion earlier in his career, arrived at conclusions similar to those of Ratzinger, a theologian and scholar responsible for molding the critical theological output of the Church in the second half of the twentieth century. This is not a striking observation since Habermas's new soft spot for religion and its usefulness for consolation and social cohesion has been thoroughly noted by others. William Meyer's article, "Private Faith or Public Religion? An Assessment of Habermas's Changing View of Religion" (1995), describes this as a more tolerable view of religion since it provided humans with a way to "come to grips with the shattering experiences that crash in on the profane character of everyday life" (Meyer 1995, 376). Maeve Cooke's article, "Salvaging and Secularizing the Semantic Contents of Religion: The Limitations of Habermas's Postmetaphysical Proposal" (2006), finds the shift in Habermas's view on post-metaphysical philosophy's relationship with religion as one from dismissive to receptive based on two changes observed in Habermas's writings. First, religion was viewed as a legitimate contributor to politics, especially if translated into a secular language, and second, the religious traditions offered "the evocative images, exemplary figures, and inspirational narratives it needs for its social and political projects" (Cooke 2006, 187). These insights into Habermas's view on the utility of religion, which coincidentally also includes the value of narrative context, is not meant to infer Habermas belongs within the camp of the communitarian critique, but he is certainly engaged in the same topics, such as the power of narrative and particularism and how to deal with pluralism. In the Munich encounter, Habermas found himself acknowledging gross oversights of modern political philosophy, which discarded religion, while Ratzinger, in light of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001,

examined the dangers religious fundamentalism poses without the proper oversight of reason. In this event, both authors seek to find a balance between the claims of universalism and particularism, and do so in a spirit similar to that debated in the communitarian critique.

Challenges and Chapter Organization

Before discussing the Habermas event, this chapter presents two background sections: 1) a review of Pope John Paul II's 1998 encyclical letter, *Fides et Ratio* (*Faith and Reason*), and 2) the definitions of two key terms—faith and reason—used in Ratzinger's Munich essay as used in his previous writings. To understand the theological backdrop of Ratzinger's view on faith and reason, one must first understand John Paul's *Fides et Ratio*.²⁶ The letter merits a discussion in this chapter, as well this research project in general, for two reasons. First, it represents a potential constraint that Ratzinger would be operating under if he wishes to maintain message accuracy with the Church. Second, it offers a glimpse into the Church's position via John Paul on pluralism, linking this chapter to the previous communitarian chapter, since it raises questions regarding the necessity of homogenous societies, whether in a population's thought or its cultural and ethnic origins. The discussion of pluralism also continues in the Pera exchange and *Crisis of Cultures* address.

²⁶ Pope Leo XII's encyclical letter, *Aeterni Patris* (1879), is also essential for understanding the Church's quest to bring faith and reason into dialogue with another, as even John Paul II's *Fides et Ratio* cites the letter's central point that philosophy informs faith and theology and its praise of St. Thomas as the "Angelic Doctor" (John Paul II 1998, no. 57).

Through background, this chapter outlines key topics (reason, faith, relativism) and their definitions, which are not only useful for interpreting this event and those that follow but also serve as a baseline from which to identify a significant change in Ratzinger's works. These topics will continue to resurface throughout this research project. With Ratzinger having written so extensively, it may be possible to find obscure passages in contradiction, but the works cited here do establish a baseline from which to measure whether he has shifted from his previous views of the Church's last major work on this subject, *Fides*. While the history of the faith-reason dialogue in the Church is a secondary fruit of this chapter—the primary being the demonstration of Ratzinger's rationalism to show how this becomes the driver for placing him within the communitarian critique—it is nonetheless necessary since it represents a potential constraint for him. One does observe a small deviation between John Paul and Ratzinger. Whereas *Fides* sees a reciprocal relationship that puts revelation first, Ratzinger's Munich essay introduces the idea of limitations between faith and reason. This doesn't mean he rejects revelation as the starting point of first principles, but rather that he allows for a slight caveat—limitations as a safeguard. Given the circumstances of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, both Ratzinger and Habermas recognize this as a necessary escape hatch.

The biggest challenge in examining the works discussed in this chapter is in distinguishing between faith and revelation, which is why this chapter includes a section on how Ratzinger has used these terms in his previous writings. Faith can easily be conflated with revelation because the distinction is not always clear, and there are moments when they appear to be interchangeable. Properly understood, faith is the action

one takes and sustains in believing and contemplating information provided through the divine act of revelation. Revelation can be understood as the result of when God or another higher entity transmits knowledge that is undiscoverable to a particular person, who then knows what he/she has just learned is unattainable due to the limits of the human intellect (Ward 1994, 16). There is a temptation to simply describe the tension in the Ratzinger and Habermas encounter as one of *revelation* and reason rather than *faith* and reason; however, it is preferable to discuss this in terms of faith since this requires believers to release a significant part of their self-autonomy to accept a personally unobserved act in deference to a divine act experienced by others.

One could argue the harmony Ratzinger and John Paul describe between faith and reason only works if they (faith and revelation) are seen as one and the same. Ratzinger suffers from this dilemma, though to a lesser degree than John Paul. *Fides* and Ratzinger's pre-Munich works make sense only if revelation is seen as a starting point, since both Ratzinger and John Paul want faith to be rational, logical, and in harmony with reason. Faith accepts at its core unobservable premises in the form of revelation via the Word of God, the Gospel. Ratzinger's works prior to the Habermas event are certainly in line with this perspective, but the Munich essay suggests a slight deviation. That essay calls for faith and reason to put limits on one another. Rather than simply position reason as a process that guides faith, which is what both Ratzinger's earlier works and *Fides* assert, in the Munich essay he puts into place a safeguard to check faith and religion when either becomes an irrational fundamentalist version of itself. Surprisingly, Habermas puts forth the same assertion, but his approach is on a more philosophical

level, as he calls on religious doctrines and the rationalism born of the Enlightenment to place limits on one another.

Ratzinger's work is cut out for him in attempting to reconcile revelation and reason. Catholic scholar and theologian Fr. James Schall notes that "[f]aith and the intellectual life of man are often posed as if they were in conflict with each other, as if we had to choose one or the other." Instead, Schall sees revelation as capable of enriching the intellectual life since it offers a more expansive set of knowledge to unanswered questions. In addition, one might say that when the "natural intellect" is perfected and the *what is* in the world is understood, philosophy becomes prepared to receive revelation (Schall 2004, 103–6). The idea here is that by way of faith, revelation fills a gap that reason or philosophy simply cannot. Ratzinger's proposed limitations on faith and reason are means to preserve the idea of a knowledge gap, and the humility one must accept so as not to overstep one's bounds and succumb to any form of extremism, religious or secular.

Fides et Ratio: A Predecessor's View on Truth, Pluralism, and Inculturation

In *Fides et Ratio*, Ratzinger's papal predecessor argues that faith, reason, and the "contemplation of truth" owe much to pre-modern philosophy (no. 47). John Paul leans heavily on St. Thomas Aquinas's idea that there can be no contradiction between faith and reason (no. 43). Both must live in harmony without fear of the other and should provide mutual support (no. 100).²⁷ John Paul declares that Thomas represents the

²⁷ John Paul cites the First Vatican Ecumenical Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith, *Dei Filius*, IV: DS 3019.

position of the Church and “an authentic model for all who seek the truth.” This phrase of endorsement is immediately followed with further praise on Thomas’s ability achieve this harmony:

In his thinking, the demands of reason and the power of faith found the most elevated synthesis ever attained by human thought, for he could defend the radical newness introduced by Revelation without ever demeaning the venture proper to reason (no. 78).

Similar to the postulations of Ratzinger and Habermas in their encounter, *Fides* explains the radical ideologies that can develop when either faith or reason is taken to its most extreme form. A rationalism in which reason ventures to an extreme becomes nihilism, whereas faith without reason is capable of “withering into myth or superstition” (no. 46–48). Rationalism’s extreme is nihilistic because values become completely subjective and a matter of victory for convincing rhetoric or force whose outcomes are just as vulnerable as those they refuted. This creates a feeling of meaninglessness and continual unease. Myth and superstition are grounds for caution since they can inspire actions through emotion rather than sound logic and reflection. *Fides* works to alleviate these concerns by developing a reciprocal relationship between reason and faith but treats Christian revelation as the ultimate clarifier in the pursuit of truth, so long as theology and philosophy are aided by reason. While John Paul II calls this a reciprocal and circular relationship, reason is subordinated to faith since the revealed word of God is said to be the contemplative starting point:

Christian Revelation becomes the true point of encounter and engagement between philosophical and theological thinking in their reciprocal relationship. It is to be hoped therefore that theologians and philosophers will let themselves be guided by the authority of truth alone so that there will emerge a philosophy consonant with the word of God. Such a philosophy will be a place where

Christian faith and human cultures may meet, a point of understanding between believer and non-believer (no. 79).

John Paul sees reason as a process that drives faith and contemplation. Put another way, faith should follow a logical path. Despite John Paul's earlier stated optimism that the believer and non-believer may one day meet on commensurable grounds, he sees pluralism, skepticism, agnosticism, and relativism as dangerous byproducts of modernity's pure reason, for they lead to a "lack of confidence in truth" (no. 5).

Fides parallels Ratzinger's work on the intersection of faith, reason, truth, and cultures, as John Paul takes on the challenge of how cultures can transcend boundaries and find common truth. The letter positions pluralism as a challenging multitude of viewpoints rather than simply reducing it to an issue of cultural differences. John Paul's solution to the issue of pluralism revolves around the idea that there is a universality to the Roman Catholic tradition that applies to any society when it peels back its cultural circumstances and reveals the essence of itself. With regard to diversity in thought, the letter states that the rise of various doctrines and "plurality of positions," all of which are held "equally valid," has devalued truths once judged certain (no. 5). While John Paul and Ratzinger often associate weak confidence levels in the concept of truth with the rise of relativism, the root cause could easily be identified as the autonomous individual described in the communitarian critique.

While acknowledging a basis of truth, the letter takes on cultural differences by contending that "no one culture can ever become the criterion of judgment, much less the ultimate criterion of truth with regard to God's Revelation" (no. 71). In other words, one particular culture cannot in itself hold a closer representation of the truth; so when we

hear John Paul talk about plurality in this sense it is with regard to philosophical viewpoints, not the fitness or even superiority of one culture. The communitarian critique, however, would question what role culture plays in political socialization and what effect this has on viewpoint. There is also an irony here since John Paul goes on to talk about the influence of Greek philosophy on the Gospel and Catholic theology. He is concerned with the challenge cultural pluralism presents by denying the “universal value of the Church’s philosophical heritage”; however, he recognizes that “[i]n preaching the Gospel, Christianity first encountered Greek philosophy; but this does not mean at all that other approaches are precluded” (no. 69–72). So, did Christianity experience its own inculturation when it came into contact with Greek philosophy? Or, was Greek philosophy and language already a part of Christianity? John Paul answers these questions in the following passage, suggesting that the Church experienced its own inculturation with the Greco-Latin world:

in engaging great cultures for the first time, the Church cannot abandon what she has gained from her inculturation in the world of Greco-Latin thought. To reject this heritage would be to deny the providential plan of God who guides his Church down the paths of time and history (no. 72).

There is an inference here that the Church added its own contribution to philosophy at this point of inculturation.

For the most part, Ratzinger’s work during John Paul’s reign and after—up until the Munich event—is in sync with *Fides*. Ratzinger’s more developed pieces place faith and reason within contemporary political thought, as he attempts to find a home for his rationalism in liberal democracy. Both John Paul and Ratzinger were staunch critics of

relativism (philosophic pluralism), but Ratzinger's rationalism leaves the window of reason open a little wider than John Paul's.

Ratzinger's own awareness and admiration of the letter is seen in his article, "Culture of Truth: Some Reflections on the Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio*," in which he explains *Fides* and its call to examine the "ultimate questions" about such topics as sin and grace and death and eternal life, lest man begins to forget what is "authentically human" (Ratzinger 1999, 376). One can only expect that Ratzinger would fully endorse the letter. Any deviation from *Fides* to Ratzinger's Munich paper, whether intended or not, is not necessarily a contradiction of *Fides* or Ratzinger's previous writings but rather a refinement—an evolution in sync with Ratzinger's earlier writings that contends new dimensions are to be discovered through faith when led by reason. Attention should be called to the year Ratzinger's views on *Fides* were written, 1999. The world experienced a dramatic change after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, so again, the shift seen is a wider opening for the role of reason.

Ratzinger's Previous Works on Faith and Reason

The Habermas exchange represents a culmination of decades of Ratzinger's work on the intersection of law with faith and reason. What separates this exchange from previous writings is that Ratzinger puts into place a new system—the cooperative limitations faith and reason may place on one another—to evaluate truth claims and reconcile faith with reason in the public sphere rather than through theology or the Catholic faith alone. Previously, the concepts of relativism, truth, and faith were dealt

with broadly, but the re-emergence of religion-inspired violence revealed a need for further examination. The essay presented in Munich to Habermas and others provides a new solution.

Prior to his papacy, Ratzinger gave three in-depth interviews,²⁸ which offer insights into his thoughts and writings. These interviews and other key texts of his help bring definition to the core philosophical concepts used throughout the Habermas event. They also show a consistent pattern in Ratzinger's treatment of faith and reason, a general consonance with *Fides*, and evidence of the many years he has spent thinking about this subject—much of which reflects his own personal struggles with the tension between faith and reason. In all of Ratzinger's writings on faith and reason we see a similarity to MacIntyre's assertion that reason is a tool to be used to instruct rather than an end or value in and of itself, as it helps transform humans from how they happen to be by aiding them in realizing their potential. This is evident in Ratzinger's view that faith is something that must be renewed and nurtured to reach its end and the idea that reason informs a process to reach spiritual perfection. This point also reaches to the element of humility found in Ratzinger's understanding of faith.

In the Habermas event, many of Ratzinger's thoughts on faith and reason crystallize into a compact explanation of how the tension between the two played out in the beginning of the twenty-first century in the context of religious fundamentalism, in this case a radical Islam that inspired the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, which

²⁸ *God and the World: Believing and Living in Our Time: A Conversation with Peter Seewald* (2002); *Salt of the Earth: The Church at the End of the Millennium: An Interview with Peter Seewald* (1997); and *The Ratzinger Report: An Exclusive Interview on the State of the Church with Vittorio Messori* (1985). Before English translations were produced, the published dates were, respectively, 2000, 1996, and 1985.

can be looked at as an example of corrupted faith. Ratzinger had dealt with religion-inspired political extremism in the 1980s as head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith when he confronted the phenomenon of liberation theology in South American Catholicism. Reflecting back on this political-religious hybrid, he states in his *Salt of the Earth* interview with Peter Seewald that with liberation theology “there was the threat of politicization of the faith that would have forced it into an irresponsible political partisanship, thus destroying the properly religious dimension” (1996b, 94). He expresses a similar sentiment in a 1996 address to the presidents of the Doctrinal Commissions of the Bishops’ Conference of Latin America, where he noted: “The fact is that when politics are used to bring redemption, they promise too much. When they presume to do God’s work, they become not divine but diabolical” (1996a, 228). Both the 2001 terrorist attacks and liberation theology can be looked on as materialized examples of corrupted faith, out-of-sync with Ratzinger and John Paul’s normative understandings of faith and reason.

Defining Reason in Previous Works

Ratzinger’s previous works discuss reason in regard to sufficiency, its utility in discovering truth, and what happens when it takes on an extreme form such as relativism, also described as consequentialism and proportionalism. Most important, reason is not completely detached from faith, as Ratzinger rolls up reason as a component of faith—this is discussed as the third point in the next section, in which he defines his understanding of the concept of faith.

The self-sufficiency of philosophy has been on Ratzinger's mind as far back as his post-doctoral work, *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure* (1971), a study of the relationship between history and metaphysics as understood by Bonaventure. The study does little to interject Ratzinger's own position on the relationship between faith and reason, but one can interpret a lack of critique of Bonaventure—a theologian whose writings are ripe in anti-Aristotelianism and the subordination of philosophy as a self-sufficient method to theology—as an insight into Ratzinger's own views at the time.

Locking down a clear definition of reason as a tool is less about what it is and more about what it looks like when left unchained and without the backdrop of revelation as a starting point. Rather than viewing reason as an end in and of itself, it is simply sound logic that builds off premises. One accepts that premises (also understood as first principles) are verified by some truth criterion or observation. This is a tricky subject for faith since there is little room for verification of revelation. One target of modernity with a purported scientific foundation that resurfaces throughout Ratzinger's writings is the Marxist enterprise, which he often links, albeit in a tangential way, to relativism. In the same address to the Bishops' Conference of Latin America mentioned earlier, he uses the technique of observation—the historically demonstrated failure of the Marxist system—to strip it of merit while also linking it to relativism. He believes the ideology's key failure was its reliance on scientific method and knowledge of world history to underpin its promises. The failure of this “scientifically based system for solving human problems could only justify nihilism or, at the least, total relativism” (1996a, 228). There is a clear distaste here for the pseudo-scientific methods of Marxism.

Ratzinger's approach to relativism also offers some insights into his own communitarian leanings and critique of liberal democracy, particularly the moral disorder that MacIntyre describes in *After Virtue*. Ratzinger calls relativism "the philosophical foundation of democracy" (1996a, 229). He claims the reason for this is that in a democracy:

no one can presume to know the true way, and it is enriched by the fact that all roads are mutually recognized as fragments of the effort toward that which is better. Therefore, all roads seek something common in dialogue, and they also compete regarding knowledge that cannot be compatible in one common form. A system of freedom ought to be essentially a system of positions that are connected with one another because they are relative, as well as dependent on historical situations open to new developments. (1996a, 229).

While Ratzinger understands relativism to be the cause of value incompatibility, which we could easily equate to the same moral disorder described by MacIntyre, it is actually the result. The driver is better understood in MacIntyre's terms as the disappearance of common language and narrative. This passage also lays out the challenges communitarians believe individuals face in judging actions and the political institutions that support the freedom for one to make these judgments. The ability to set up such a system is dependent on the capability to define truth or the moral codes by which one would construct (a pragmatic-, positivist-, or subjectivist-understood perspective) or discover (objectivist perspective) a society.

Ratzinger is aware of the objective-subjective challenge, often connecting it to the pursuit of truth. In his interview with Peter Seewald, he states that through the rise of relativism "it seems to modern man undemocratic, intolerant, and also incompatible with the scientist's necessary skepticism to say that we have the truth and that something else is not the truth, or is only fragmentary truth" (1996b, 134). In his *Ratzinger Report*

interview with Vittorio Messori, he defines relativism as “consequentialism” and “proportionalism” whereby the former discovers the goodness of an act as a condition dependent on its foreseeable end and consequences, and the latter evaluates moral conduct based on the “‘proportion’ between good and evil” of the effects that an act will yield (1985, 90).

In the Habermas event, as well as the Pera exchange, Ratzinger carves out a place for God and faith in society. In previous writings, he takes on modern thinkers such as Nietzsche, who sought to push divine forces from the public sphere.²⁹ This thought carried over into contemporary times and is now compounded by what Ratzinger describes in his *God and the World* interview as a “culture of technology, and welfare [that] rests on the belief that basically we can do anything,” which, in turn, causes the role of God to leave the stage (2000, 27).

Defining Faith in Previous Works

Ratzinger’s writings prior to the Munich event contain three prominent elements of faith that are pertinent to this study’s definition of faith in a philosophical context: personal transcendence, perennial renewal, and reason as a component of faith. Overall, these three elements contribute to a feeling of humility when it comes to faith and spiritual perfection. One finds his descriptions of faith to be as an imperfect yet resilient entity that functions like a living, breathing organism that must be nourished, practiced, and challenged to remain healthy. Ratzinger’s “On the Meaning of Faith” describes “chief points of faith” that include “God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, grace and sin,

²⁹ See pp. 92–93 of Ratzinger’s *God and the World: Believing and Living in Our Time*.

sacraments and church, death and eternal life,” all of which “are never outmoded” (1997, 211). His feeling is that faith is here to stay since there is something about the human condition that has allowed it to persist.

When faith is in action, it provides personal transcendence through either a communal or divine transformation—communal through participation in the Church, divine by connecting to God through communion. Personal to communal transcendence is important because it shows an attempt on the part of the Church to preserve the individual sphere and elements of the self, but only with regard to what this means for the group, which ultimately places one closer to God. “On the Meaning of Faith” also describes faith as a personal act that transcends and liberates the self, bringing it into communion with God through communion with Christ (1997, 212). In his *Salt of the Earth* interview Ratzinger states that when one finally encounters Christ, God who is a man, “a culture of faith arises” (1996b, 35). This is the same culture of faith that Ratzinger speaks to in the Pera exchange, and this then becomes *a sense of the sacred*, so the implication is larger than application to the Habermas event in understanding what Ratzinger means by “faith.”

To sustain the life of faith, it must “be constantly renewed,” according to Ratzinger in “On the Meaning of Faith” (1997, 211). This can be quite challenging, and is intended to be more than simply self-preservation. In the *God and the World* interview, Ratzinger states that faith is always under pressure and threat, and if dealt with properly can strengthen individuals’ beliefs as they mature through the various stages of life. As such, faith never turns into what Ratzinger calls a “convenient ideology” (2000, 36). In addition, faith contains a degree of skepticism when attempting to ascertain truth so as to

avoid succumbing to religious fundamentalism or blind quests to harness the incorporeal. In the *Salt* interview Ratzinger warns against the dangers of “[t]he quest for certainty and simplicity,” stating that these efforts have the potential to result in “fanaticism and narrow-mindedness” (1996b, 137). One accepts both a hierarchical placement in the awe of God and the idea that faith is a work-in-progress that embodies even the view of non-believers and skeptics, making humility an important part of the faithful life. Furthermore, there is never an end to knowledge acquisition, especially of the divine, as he states in the *God and the World* interview: “It is never the case that we can say, ‘Now we know everything; now the knowledge of Christianity is complete.’ There are unfathomable depths both in God and in human life, so that there are always new dimensions to faith” (2000, 38). Ratzinger believes that what man (and this includes the Church) asserts he does know about God through revelation and the Gospel is likely an incomplete interpretation; however, this interpretation becomes clearer as each generation discovers new dimensions about God (2000, 38). All of these thoughts on faith’s imperfections lead to an overarching and humbling sense that while faith is the acceptance of an unscientific measurement, it is still satisfactory. Ratzinger calls on religion to acknowledge its own limits, but he still recognizes and accepts the unscientific nature of faith. He understands that “faith cannot be rationally demonstrated” (2000, 48) and that “faith in God is not a form of knowledge that can be learned like chemistry or mathematics, but remains a belief” (2000, 33). To become dependent on scientific knowledge, one can only see what is tangible, preventing one from seeing what science cannot measure, God. The take-away from Ratzinger’s emphasis on this is that he doesn’t want the unobservable to undercut any sense of satisfaction that can be found within

faith—it is sufficient in and of itself, so long as it is guided by reason and prudence and does not lead to fanaticism, so it is no coincidence that reason is seen as a component of faith, making it consistent with John Paul’s *Fides* encyclical. For Ratzinger, faith and reason must live in harmony, especially in the pursuit of truth. In the *Salt* interview he states that faith comes from God who is reason itself, and by submitting in faith to him, even though one will not understand him, one opens the door to understanding (1996b, 33). What’s more, “[f]aith demands to be understood” according to Ratzinger in his *God and the World* interview (2000, 47).

Jürgen Habermas’s Munich Essay: “Pre-political Foundations of the Democratic Constitutional State”

Before analyzing Ratzinger’s essay, this chapter looks at Habermas’s piece presented at the same occasion. The essay begins by asking whether law as de facto legislation, and nothing else, is still capable of providing “a secular justification of political rule...that is nonreligious or postmetaphysical” (22). This query injects the principal issue Habermas works to resolve in his essay: How can religion be integrated into democratic constitutional states that, to an extent, depend on a state shedding religious or metaphysical baggage, when many of its constituents still possess such artifacts in the form of religious practices or the deeply ingrained beliefs unassociated with any religious affiliation? The difficulty lies in the fact that an environment that easily reconciles opposing views cannot be fostered when citizens subscribe to beliefs grounded in non-observable phenomena. The integration of religion into democracy struggles because a plurality of viewpoints exists in a landscape in which the intersection

of premises and evidence is hard to locate. This makes any viewpoint as valid as the next, whether it is metaphysical viewpoints standing against one another or metaphysical views standing against post-metaphysical views, such as those born out of the Enlightenment and the modern era. This is the same challenge noted in the communitarian critique as competing, independent first principles, particularly when a multitude exist through disparate sets of moral language. For MacIntyre, this is the idea that when we trace back rival conclusions to their premises (first principles) we often find them nothing more than assertions (AV, 8). The trouble with this is that one assertion is just as sound as the next. The communitarian critique at large points to the Enlightenment as the trigger for this confusion. Habermas's essay does not take on the cause, but rather addresses how to reconcile the existing conditions of the objective-subjective divide in post-secular societies.

To produce a more sustainable and effective system in the post-secular world, Habermas suggests that “both the traditions of the Enlightenment and the religious doctrines reflect on their own respective limits.” His solution is based on the idea that for a liberal society to thrive, there must be a solidarity among its citizens. To do this, liberal states will have to account for the values of both believers and unbelievers (22–23).

Habermas on Catholicism

Given that Ratzinger and the Catholic Academy of Bavaria are in prime focus, Habermas takes time to connect the role of reason in establishing law with the Catholic tradition, noting that the Church has found ways to construct laws outside of the metaphysical world—such as its comfort level with the concept of *lumen natural* (human

reason guided by natural light)—to justify either morality or law independent of revelation (25). It is not known whether Ratzinger was provided a copy of Habermas's essay prior to writing his piece, but it is important to highlight that Ratzinger draws on this same method in his essay when recalling how the Church encouraged Catholic politicians to handle the matter of abortion in a non-metaphysical sense. Habermas is also aware of the challenges Catholicism faces in confronting the Enlightenment and liberalism, and he highlights some of the very issues Ratzinger addresses later in the *Crisis of Cultures* address and *Regensburg Lecture*, particularly Ratzinger's co-opt of the Enlightenment. It is difficult to correlate the Habermas exchange with Ratzinger's discussions of modernity and the Enlightenment in subsequent chapters, but the following passage from Habermas's essay gets to the heart of Ratzinger's predicament in addressing the modern world:

A radical skepticism vis-à-vis reason is profoundly alien to the Catholic tradition; but until the 1960s, Catholicism had great difficulties in understanding the secular thinking of humanism, the Enlightenment, and political liberalism. And this is why, even today, there is a ready audience for the theory that the remorseful modern age can find its way out of the blind alley only by means of the religious orientation to a transcendent point of reference (37).

Habermas on Shaping Solidarity

Habermas believes the liberal state demands a constitution independent of religious and metaphysical traditions and can only be created through a democratic process. The constitution is authored by its citizens, who expect those addressed by the law to not transgress its barriers. At the same time, the citizens are expected to make use of their rights to free speech and participation in government for both their own interests and the common good (29–30). Looking out for one's fellow citizen cannot be forced,

making solidarity difficult to achieve; however, this solidarity is essential for a healthy democracy. Law based on embedded cultural values makes solidarity a conceptual reality: “An abstract solidarity, mediated by the law, arises among citizens only when the principles of justice have penetrated more deeply into the complex of ethical orientations in a given culture” (34). As evidence, Habermas uses his native country, Germany, and the history of the Federal Republic of Germany and the European Constitution as an example of “a common language, and, above all, [a] newly awakened national consciousness, help[ing to] create a highly abstract solidarity on the part of citizens” (32).

Civil bonds can break when citizens act “on the basis of their own self-interest” and use “subjective rights only as weapons against each other,” or when markets take control of the global economy (35–36). What Habermas sees here is the corruption of autonomy—whether on the individual citizen level in a rights-based war against all, or more broadly the winner-take-all system of an unregulated global marketplace. In either case, these entities are emboldened to dominate without consideration or law to guide behaviors. If the jurisprudential arguments for laws that would counter this were to be constructed, they would need to take into account both philosophy and religion, and this understanding is the centerpiece of Habermas’s essay. Philosophy must take the phenomenon of religion in a secularized environment seriously, and as a challenge (38).

Habermas’s Munich Rationalism

While calling on philosophy to take religion seriously, the principal driver for Habermas’s own rationalism is not clear in his essay, but one wonders whether he believes reason has its origins in something prior to philosophy. He writes: “when reason

reflects on its deepest foundations, it discovers that it owes its origins to something else” (40). At first glance, one might be led to believe that Habermas is inferring some type of metaphysical transcendence such as the Active Intellect, but upon further inspection this looks more like an acknowledgment of the impact cultural influences have on reason. In that vein, philosophy and religion should do more than simply respect one another—they should be willing to learn from one another, as they are intertwined in intricate ways that both the believer and unbeliever may be unable to see. Habermas believes philosophy itself has both functional and substantial reasons to remain open to this. Using the Western mode of philosophy as an example of the “mutual compenetration of Christianity and Greek metaphysics,” he says that this can be seen in Hellenized Christianity and the absorption of Christian ideas into philosophy (44). This understanding explains Habermas’s conclusion that secularist citizens play an important role in liberal societies. Secularists act as interpreters of believers, translating “relevant contributions from the religious language into a language that is accessible to the public as a whole” (52).³⁰ This can only be made possible under a state-supported umbrella of tolerance that protects both unbelievers and diverse sets of believers. Under these conditions, believers should expect public resistance and secularists should give consideration to the idea that truth can be expressed through religious imagery (50–51). To convince the secularist of this view, one might consider the value of parable and the

³⁰ Habermas cites his own work in this closing idea: J. Habermas, *Glauben und Wissen* (Frankfurt am Main, 2001).

method of tiered interpretations expressed by medievalists such as Maimonides in the *Guide of the Perplexed*,³¹ or the power of narrative described by communitarians.

Joseph Ratzinger's Munich Essay: "That Which Holds the World Together: The Pre-Political Moral Foundations of a Free State"

Ratzinger's essay seeks to reconcile the issues that arise out of the relationship between faith and reason, particularly in pluralistic societies. He is aware that the quest for a universal culture or way of thinking to connect disparate, and even similar, peoples has long been a challenge for the Church. The concepts in his essay belong to a long tradition in political philosophy that begins with Aristotle's notion of human insufficiency, the concept of rule of law, and justice's relationship to truth, and moves as far forward as Strauss's discussion of the conflict between the biblical and Greek philosophic and even further to the discussions in late twentieth-century communitarianism. Specifically, the essay touches on communitarian notions that state that individual morals are constructed, or at least influenced by, the community to which they belong. Related, the essay also exposes the dangers that extreme individualism born out of the post-Enlightenment era can lead to. Early in Ratzinger's essay he makes a passing mention of Catholic theologian and priest Hans Küng's proposal of a "world ethos," which sets the expectation that Ratzinger will explore the idea of a global social glue—a subject at the heart of Ratzinger's mature political writings and well established in some of the basic fundamental questions of political philosophy.

³¹ For example, in this work Maimonides argues that the Torah was written in parable form to express two different levels of interpretation: a surface one for the average reader, and another, more complex level that only the more highly educated understood.

It is difficult to determine what a world ethos would look like for Ratzinger in this essay, but he does assert what should *not* be a part of the process to create it, namely, science, since it “played a role in the collapse of the old moral certainties” (56). One wishes Ratzinger would have pushed this concept of world ethos further—whether in criticism of or support for—but other works of his fill this void, specifically, those that address inculturation, as seen in the *Regensburg Lecture* (see chapter 5). Ratzinger likely held his tongue on pursuing either since a critique would have brought into question the universal nature of the Church, while explicitly advocating this would have placed himself too close to Küng, who a year earlier had begun seeking to restore his teaching rights in Catholic universities.³²

Despite Ratzinger’s mitigation of science, he does acknowledge the value of the discipline in relation to philosophy. Science provides the criteria to distinguish scientific from non-scientific findings, while, similarly, philosophy possesses an artful eye and comprehensive humanistic outlook for extracting the non-scientific elements from scientific results (57). While Ratzinger is clearly acknowledging the merits of science, he is still assigning it a subordinate role since knowledge of the whole is made possible by philosophy. His essay aims to clarify this equivocal technique of sterilizing scientific results. Along the way, it offers a number of insights into Ratzinger’s political mind on such topics as the origins of law, majority consensus, human rights, and, most important, the role of reason in both democracy and religion. Ratzinger understands that he is presenting to a dual audience—Habermas and the Catholic Academy of Bavaria—and

³² See Gill Donovan’s article, “Hans Küng Turns 75, Seeks Reconciliation with Vatican,” in the *National Catholic Reporter* Vol. 39, No. 22 (April 4, 2003).

uses this opportunity to develop what can be viewed as a compact synthesis of years of academic development and theological output on how he believes religion intersects with secularism in society and its laws. His discussions of universal religion and law represent the apex of his piece and are essential for defining communities global or local. The world has been globalizing throughout Ratzinger's career—a fact he notes in the opening sentences of the essay—and the Church is in a unique position to address this as it is both a state and an organization with an international ideological reach into the attitudes and behavior of its followers. Ratzinger's ideas on reason and the implications for identity and community organizing are applicable to local communities, states, and even continental or global identities such as those connected through common religious denominations. He is certainly speaking to a Western, specifically European, audience, but one could easily apply these principles on a global scale or at least regionally within Europe, as is the case in the Marcello Pera exchange, in which Ratzinger calls for resurrecting a *sense of the sacred* to mold communities and even law.

Importance of the Origins of Law

Law is an important discussion point for reason and revelation since it represents an output formed through their interactions and the general culture surrounding them. For Ratzinger, power without the anchor of law takes on an arbitrary nature. In discussing law, freedom, and anarchy, Ratzinger challenges what could be seen as the Thrasymachus position on power³³ as advanced by this interlocutor of Socrates in Plato's *Republic*. This is the idea that justice is the advantage of the stronger. There is no direct

³³ See Book I, section 338c–341a, of Plato's *Republic*.

reference to Plato's work in Ratzinger's essay, but the target is the same as he takes aim at this position: "[Power] is not the law of the stronger, but the strength of the law that must hold sway" (58). His interpretation also embodies elements from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*,³⁴ as he emphasizes the buffer that law must perform on power:

Power as structured by law, and at the service of the law, is the antithesis of violence, which is a lawless power that opposes the law. This is why it is important for every society to overcome any suspicion that is cast on the law and its regulations, for it is only in this way that arbitrariness can be excluded and freedom can be experienced as a freedom shared in common with others. Freedom without law is anarchy and, hence, the destruction of freedom (58).

There is no freedom without law, for when law is designed properly it ensures basic fundamental rights of human equality. How Ratzinger would employ law to mold fundamental characteristics of a civilization's culture becomes clear later—he sees law as a call to bring a *sense of the sacred* back into the public sphere.

Although law might be used to shape a society, it also must represent the interests of the many. Ratzinger posits a deference to common interests that carries with it an understanding that there are times when self-interest and belief in one's expertise must be set aside. He argues that law should be formulated by the group instead of the few. This represents both a "democratic will" and an "expression of the common interest of all" (59). Just how democratic Ratzinger intends this formulation to be takes into account the dispositions of majorities.

³⁴ In Book X of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle writes that his concept of the highest and most complete moral virtues—beautiful actions perfected through a life of contemplation—must be emphasized through law since this is the best way they can become habitual (1179b). In short, law becomes the stabilizing force that promotes moral action. In the final words of the *Ethics*, Aristotle introduces the core subject of his next work, *Politics*, and the idea that certain constitutions can preserve cities and under what conditions (laws and customs) that can take place.

As Ratzinger explores how law is formed, and the effects majorities have in forming it, a communitarian balancing act between the group and the individual emerges, as well as the classic dilemma in political philosophy laid out by Aristotle regarding the rule of law (the one, few, or many).³⁵ Ratzinger reminds his audience that a majority, even a statistically potent one, does not guarantee that the law that strong majority crafts is free from neglecting the consideration of minorities. Regardless of who forms the law, there is still an objective standard for which Ratzinger suggests lawmakers aim. He calls this “something that is antecedent to every majority decision and must be respected by all such decisions” (60).

Human rights are an example of this, as they are an objective, universal standard that transcends time; they are “self-subsistent values that flow from the essence of what it is to be a man, and are therefore inviolable: no other man can infringe them” (61). The idea here is that humans are entitled to certain rights, whether by a natural order as one would find in Lockean property dialogue or those set by God through revelation. This is not an uncommon idea, as human rights are also referred to as universal in the political and legal sectors.³⁶ However, Ratzinger does question whether these values can be

³⁵ See Book III, chapter 7 of Aristotle’s *Politics*, in which he lays out three types of constitutions, both right and wrong: kingship (one), aristocracy (few), and constitutional government or polity (many) as the right types; and tyranny (one), oligarchy (few), and democracy (many) as the wrong types.

³⁶ For example, in 1948 the General Assembly of the United Nations’s “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” articulated certain “inalienable rights of the human family” (preamble) that include a number of rights taken to be universal: rights extend to all regardless of background and makeup (Article 2); “the right to life, liberty, and the security of person” (Article 3); freedom from slavery (Article 4) and inhuman treatment and punishment (Article 5); freedom of movement and residence (Article 12); property ownership (Article 17), and freedom of opinion and expression (Article 19). There are other articles that would also apply, but those listed here are certainly universal and point to some abstract concept of an objective good.

sustained since they are not regarded as the same in every culture (61). Without providing specific examples of deviations, Ratzinger notes that, for instance, Islam's catalog of human rights differs from that of the West (61).

Human rights are a product of natural law, and Ratzinger thinks this discovery could be pushed further. This is not surprising, given the emphasis he has placed on the concept of human dignity throughout his career when promoting the pro-life movement. Ratzinger views human rights as a matter of "human obligation and of human limitations" (71). This is a very notable proclamation, considering the implications for liberal entitlement theory, which focuses on protecting the personal sphere. Curbing this freedom further places Ratzinger within the communitarian camp of balancing the individual with the group; in this case, a slight restraint on personal freedom fulfills an obligation to preserve the group. If obligations to a group or natural law exist, Ratzinger hopes we might see parallel structures across cultures that point to a rational nature, and hence, to the possibility that a rational law is present for different groups throughout the world:

For Christians, this dialogue would speak of the creation and the Creator. In the Indian world, this would correspond to the concept of "dharma," the inner law that regulates all Being; in the Chinese tradition, it would correspond to the idea of the structures ordained in heaven (72).

Given the range of global diversity—whether in philosophic thought, religion, or its intertwined cultural differences—Ratzinger doubts that either a universal religion or a single secular rational model could unite the world. He concludes that Küng's world ethos proposition "remains an abstraction" (76). This conclusion is consistent with a larger idea advanced by the essay: that stability within a society is achieved when an

equilibrium between the secular and faithful is reached. It is not simply a case of one side willing itself over the other.

Terrorism and Religious Fundamentalism: When Reason Becomes Will

The subject of terrorism seems an odd insertion for a discussion on law, except for the threat that terrorism rooted in religious fundamentalism poses for the purity of religion and law. Terrorism operates outside of the framework of law and social compacts, sometimes taking inspiration in contrast to the consensus of the majority who defines laws and governmental systems. Ratzinger is deeply concerned with what he calls the “anonymous powers of terror, which can be present anywhere, and are strong enough to pursue everyone into the sphere of everyday life” (63). In comparison, fears born out of the aftermath of the Second World War, namely, the fear of nuclear annihilation, were kept in check by “[t]he mutual limitation of power, and the fear for one’s own survival proved powerful enough to save the world” (62–63). In other words, the equality of threat and mutual agreement stopped possible nuclear conflicts. Twenty-first-century terrorism, on the other hand, operates on a different, less transparent level—terrorists are largely anonymous and not directly linked to a state or easily identifiable pipeline for retribution. What Ratzinger is getting at is that ideology may be the only centralized origin for both loose and linked terrorist associations. Terrorist motivations further complicate this matter since they often include a “defense of religious tradition against the godlessness of Western Society” (64). It is this link between religion and political action that has Ratzinger troubled, returning the great debate between faith and reason to the forefront at

this moment in the essay. Ratzinger's solution is that reason must act as a policing force on religious fanaticism:

If one of the sources of terrorism is religious fanaticism—and this is in fact the case—*is then religion a healing and saving force? Or is it not rather an archaic and dangerous force* that builds up false universalisms, thereby leading to intolerance and acts of terrorism? Must not religion, therefore, be placed under the guardianship of reason, and its boundaries carefully marked off? (64)

Likewise, Ratzinger believes that religion should police unrestrained reason. To illustrate a contemporary example of this, he notes mankind's ability to create humans in laboratories and develop weapons of mass destruction as products of unrestrained reason, all of which he believes question the "reliability of reason" (65). Ratzinger's proposal is to consider whether religion and reason ought to "restrict each other and remind each other where their limits are" (65–66). These concerns sound familiar to the communitarian discussion of first principles and criticism of modernity's primacy of will, choice, and self-autonomy. Humans create, and use, the atomic bomb because they can. Simply put, unchecked reason turns into pure will. MacIntyre similarly states this point by arguing that reason has been replaced by choice and will (AV, 47). Reason takes over for ethics and objective standards, and then when reason fails, will takes over. In either case, that of Ratzinger or MacIntyre and other communitarians, self-autonomy is identified as the driver.

Ratzinger's New Rationalism?

Ratzinger's rationalism in this essay presents itself as one that believes that religion (the various communities of faith) and post-secular society (the world ruled by

reason) must employ the concept of “self-limitation,” be open to learning from each other, acknowledge they need one another, and “purify and help one another” (77–78). The first two parts (openness and self-limitation) of this rationalism are explicitly noted by Ratzinger as being in general agreement with Habermas, and the second two (acknowledgment and purification) could be thought to comport as well. For Ratzinger, this is a slight refinement to the rationalism developed in his earlier writings. It’s also a significant recognition of the reach that pluralism has had throughout the West, as well as how this should be dealt with philosophically. Ratzinger is calling on faith and reason to set proper limits on one another, establishing what seems like a complimentary pairing. This is the biggest development in his view of rationalism over time. Where before he took John Paul’s cue from *Fides* and set faith and reason to live in harmony by positioning reason as a component and driver of faith, Ratzinger now adds the caveat that each should be used to set limits on the other. There is a temptation to declare that Ratzinger has placed these concepts on equal footing, but since the situation is described in terms of restraint, albeit a circular one, it is better understood as a caveat or add-on to *Fides* and Ratzinger’s previous writings. Most important for this research project, Ratzinger has gone to great depths to address subjective-objective distinctions and the role that reflection, which includes self-limitation and acceptance of a deficient knowledge of the whole, plays in resolving this matter.

The power of restraint can also be understood as proper and comprehensive reflection, particularly the form advanced by Sandel when he challenges the rigidity of Rawls’s original position and its transcendental, objective claims. In such a state, Sandel rightly characterizes bargaining as fantasy since it rejects the notion that competing

interests or preferences can exist at the same time even when rationalized back to first premises (*LLJ*, 128). The original position, like the state of religious fundamentalists or those who choose reason and will as their primary drivers, forgoes any possibility of falsification, and in the end, humility. Additionally, Sandel would argue that no choice has been made at all. Rather, one merely confirms familiar ideas. To restrain the individual from this disposition, Sandel treats this issue as a matter of identity, in which individuals must sort through their various socialized and natural components by looking inward. His description here mentions nothing of faith, but resembles the robust reflection process for which Ratzinger and Habermas are reaching. Sandel writes:

Unlike the capacity for choice, which enables the self to reach beyond itself, the capacity for reflection enables the self to turn its lights inward upon itself, to inquire into its constitutive nature, to survey its various attachments and acknowledge their respective claims, to sort out the bounds—now expansive, now constrained—between the self and the other, to arrive at a subjectivity less fluid if never finally fixed, and so gradually through a lifetime, to participate in the constitution of its identity (*LLJ*, 153).

Identity becomes the subjective matter to sort through in the reflective process described by Sandel. In the Pera exchange, we'll also see how this change in perception, according to Ratzinger and Pera, has led to the spread of relativism in Europe and the destruction of a meaningful identity.

Ratzinger's Munich essay ends with a brief analysis of the global cultural implications that arise from the relationship between faith and reason in the West, particularly the idea that the West's push-and-pull system of Christian faith and secular rationality is indicative of Eurocentrism or even superiority. Instead, as the West learns to view faith and reason as complimentary, it should re-appropriate this relationship as a model for how to interact with other cultures (79). While previous portions of this essay

offer compelling evidence that Ratzinger doubts a world ethos is possible, he does think that a philosophic approach that borrows from the act of balancing faith and reason could also be applied to harmonizing cultural differences. As Ratzinger closes his essay, one wonders if he is suggesting a purification process that produces homogeneity, or one that genuinely accepts diversity with the understanding that there are necessary tools for tolerance that make such relations possible. Since Ratzinger has been careful not to assert a Eurocentric view, one should interpret that he is not entirely endorsing the model of homogeneity. This is important to remember before examining the Marcello Pera exchange. There, Pera takes liberties with some of Ratzinger's writings on relativism and combines them with evaluating one culture against another, something that is at great odds with Ratzinger's closing remarks in the Munich essay and which forces Ratzinger to then clarify his stance in his responses to Pera. In the Pera exchange, we see how Ratzinger's rationalism leads him to navigate what he considers to be the cloudy waters of European identity and history.

Chapter 4: Social Solidarity, Identity, and the Challenge of Pluralism in the Pera Exchange

Since the free individual can only maintain his identity within a society/culture of a certain kind, he has to be concerned about the shape of this society/culture as a whole.
– Charles Taylor, “Atomism”

Introduction

Obligation through Identity and Sacred Common Denominators

Joseph Ratzinger’s 2004 exchange with then president of the Italian Senate Marcello Pera examines a materialized demonstration of the challenge competing identities pose in respect to accepted virtues, customs, and mores in Europe, or as Ratzinger describes this concept in this event—*a sense of the sacred*. Unique to Ratzinger’s political teaching, *the sacred*—historical values, mores, and codes of conduct often intertwined with those religious beliefs most highly respected in a society—is about not letting one’s heritage become obsolete, which would culminate in the termination of cultural and philosophic predecessors. *The sacred* fosters a sense of obligation through the generational connections found when re-discovering one’s culture. For Ratzinger, it speaks to how a traditional institution such as the Church can remain relevant as a civilization changes and how citizens can be drawn to moral action as attachments to those around them are loosened through a diluted identity.

The two interlocutors in this exchange are addressing pluralism reduced to its simplest form. The Pera event picks up the discussion of reason and what role the Enlightenment and modern rationalism might have played in the proliferation of contemporary relativism, which Ratzinger and Pera link to a decaying European identity.

In this exchange, relativism can be understood as that which allows culture, philosophy, and even the Church to be treated as products that deprecate or, at the very least, become less useful over time. The communitarian critique's focus on the individual decision-making process in the perceived neutral original position highlights several core oversights of Rawls's that are also germane to Ratzinger and Pera's dialogue on relativism. These include broken moral language (MacIntyre), the varying value of social goods such as identity (Walzer), the acceptance of communal obligations (Taylor), and the recurring criticism of autonomy, which in the Pera exchange can be understood as the catalyst of philosophic plurality.

Ratzinger and Pera, like thinkers from the communitarian critique, find that particularism—in this case a continent's history—is important to the way morality and values are shaped and sustained in a society. Similar to the disorder MacIntyre found with moral language, both Ratzinger and Pera believe that as Europeans lost sight of their history and identity, they lost the common ground needed to communicate on matters of morality. In communitarian terms, this can be understood as the disappearance of a collective narrative. This presents the state with the difficult task of constituting laws, given diverse sets of values often grounded in foundations that are foreign to one another. The same issues of objective-subjective distinctions found in the Habermas encounter raise questions for this task: Is there an objective standard for communities to draw on? Are there subjective cultural factors that must be taken into consideration? Do these subjective and particular conditions point back to a universal or objective standard? There is a temptation to understand the objective route as that which Rawls advanced in the original position—a culturally sterile environment that seeks neutrality for individual

decision-making. This environment resembles Pera's approach since he believes his arguments are based on sound logic and little else. For Ratzinger, however, this is better thought of as timeless principles of justice handed down through revelation. As for the subjective conditions, this means looking at group identity and local customs and mores. In connecting these to an identity, there is hope that one will feel an obligation to others that, in turn, will foster an environment in which all persons can thrive. This mirrors Taylor's idea that society should allow all human capacities to grow. Ratzinger's *sense of a sacred* aims for the same spirit of self- and group cultivation. In the exploration of one's heritage—the route to discovering *the sacred*—individuals would likely begin developing meaningful obligations to their community after seeing the connections between one's contemporaries and their ancestors. A feeling of connection alleviates the need for the state to compel citizens into the role of the virtuous citizen since it becomes non-coercive. This can be a difficult task for legislators when crafting laws that address human needs and are mindful of sacred values or beliefs of the public, so there is a substantial reliance on the individual's behavior. This mirrors the same challenge between faith and reason in the Habermas encounter. Stepping further back in the history of political philosophy, Montesquieu offers pointed commentary on this in *The Spirit of Laws*, describing it in terms of a classic legislative challenge: "One should not enact by divine laws that which should be enacted by human laws, or regulate [by] human laws that which should be regulated by divine laws" (Book 26, chapter 2). One way to guide behavior in the direction of obligation regardless of law is through identity.

The communitarian critique views identity and social understandings as important factors that facilitate strong communities. For Sandel, a strong community is constituted

of “the shared understandings of the participants and embodied in their institutional arrangements, not simply an attribute of certain of the participants’ plans of life” (*LLJ*, 173). Similarly, Ratzinger and Pera look to increase the potency of European identity by examining its presence, or lack thereof, in the European Union’s Charter. Walzer’s commentary on identity makes Ratzinger look less communitarian in designation, but certainly places his concerns firmly within the communitarian dialogue. Walzer treats identity as the social good of membership; he sees identity as a flexible commodity that produces a “collective consciousness” of common meanings such as language, history, and culture. These meanings create a national character; however, this collective identity is not fixed (*SOJ*, 28), and this is where Ratzinger differs. On an individual level, Walzer explains that identities form out of the relationship between people and the social goods, which have a history of transactions in both the moral and material worlds (*SOJ*, 8). Ratzinger’s history lessons are launched with a similar aim of explaining Europe’s current situation by looking at how the individual psyche and morals relate to the movements of cultural institutions.

The institutional movements of the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and modernity are of significant note since they point to an underlying driver of autonomy that Ratzinger and Pera, as well as communitarians connect to breakdowns in communication. The rise of autonomy provides individuals with almost unlimited latitude to create their own identity, forgoing acceptance of larger conceptions of identity and obligation. Fr. James Schall describes this predicament as the idea that humans do not know themselves because they only know what they made themselves to be, not what they are. This construction, according to Schall, comes from “[m]odernity’s claim of

mastery of nature” (Schall 2004, 122). Using Schall’s concept, one finds a great irony in modern man’s efforts to construct his identity. Rather than taking what is about human nature, dispositions, and intellectual limits, man asserts himself ahead of observation and wills his own understanding of himself. This is a challenge unspoken by Ratzinger and Pera, but it certainly lays beneath the surface, connecting their charges against relativism with identity.

Ratzinger vs. Pera

There are a number of links between the two parties in dialogue here. There are the obvious connections, as seen in Pera’s quotations of Ratzinger in his opening lecture and the fact that the two initial pieces were delivered within a day of one another. However, there also are a number of key differences between the two that are worth noting for understanding their dialogue. Each author launches an attack on relativism, charging that it contributed to a cultural crisis in Europe. Ratzinger’s and Pera’s criticisms of relativism have their finger on autonomy, but, unfortunately, do not call it out. Instead, it’s described as the idea that all ideas are to be held equally valid. Their charges against relativism resemble MacIntyre’s discussion of emotivism, which asserts that “there are and can be *no* valid rational justifications for any claims that objective and impersonal moral standards exist and hence that there are no such standards” (19).

Both writers tread a fine line between recognizing pluralism on one side and ethnocentric, European regionalism on the other. Ratzinger lands more on the side of pluralism than Pera, as he argues that Europeans have failed to live up to the demands of

the cultural exchange embedded in multiculturalism since they have abandoned learning about, and embracing, their own history. Peculiar links arise in how both authors connect cultural identity with an assault on universal rights and a quest for truth to triumph over relativism. Ratzinger would like to replace relativism with a sense of *the sacred*—defining the values, codes, and beliefs each society holds most high—whereas Pera advocates the establishment of a civil religion in the Charter of the European Union. Pera is a secularist, and his solution is consistent with this designation since it seeks to solidify common foundations and points of reference. His hope is that such points of reference will heal Europe from what he believes is a paralysis that prevents its citizens from making value judgments in issues of morality. A civil religion would fill a communal void and become the central point of reference for morality, making it a quasi-secular solution that hinges on the non-faithful finding it permissible on pragmatic grounds and not an infringement of church-state relations.

While Ratzinger is also a critic of relativism and concerned for the vitality of European identity, his proposition of *the sacred* also separates him from the comparative nature of Pera, in that by finding one's own *sense of the sacred* the individual will inevitably recognize that others may hold a similar intensity of reverence to their own belief system. This process of self-discovery is non-coercive and places less importance, if any at all, in comparing one religion to another. It is also less likely to discard a religion upon introduction of an alternative or radical transformation. Pera, on the other hand, believes that a single system can be selected when a multitude of options exist, and identity and spiritual cultivation is best grown through governmental facilitation of a non-denominational religion. Ratzinger's and Pera's arguments for some sort of social glue

are based on the premise that identity is necessary for a population to thrive. Pera derives his civil religion from an evolutionary approach that asserts a “better” model naturally progresses in any society. He believes that the government can, and should, encourage this system—albeit a non-denominational version—via a clear and formal declaration. In comparison, Ratzinger believes that cultural heritage is an underlying social glue and found by discovering a *sense of the sacred*, which consists of beliefs held most high from generation to generation bound up in historical and cultural developments. As such, Ratzinger withholds the requirement of state endorsement and argues that a denominational model is more effective and durable since it promotes *the sacred* through detailed precepts that call for commitment. This process begins with dedicated individuals, which Ratzinger describes using the terms of Arnold Tonybee as “creative minorities,” who commit to these precepts and who through their example encourage others to join their faith. One might also say that Taylor’s notion of generational obligations is created through this. To secure firm connections, and in this case denominational commitment, Ratzinger’s position can be backed by MacIntyre. When reference points do exist but are obscured, individuals are unable to reach them due to the breakdown of moral language, whereby one is left with only “fragments of a conceptual scheme, parts which now lack those contexts from which their significance derived” (AV, 2). The detailed precepts of a denomination will allow all of the relevant cultural history to flow through. Despite Ratzinger’s preference for the denominational model, one should not conflate this as support for state or EU endorsement.

Controlling Cyclical Development

Both Ratzinger and Pera believe that Europe's declines in identity attachment, population growth, and awareness of cultural history are regressions that should be corrected. Why ought one care about this? This could easily be understood as a natural stage in the development of a civilization, similar to Ibn Khaldun's fourteenth-century theory on civilizations in *The Muqaddimah*, which posits that all civilizations (dynasties) proceed through the sequential stages of rise, peak social solidarity, decline, and eventual dissolution. In the exchange analyzed in this chapter, both Pera and Ratzinger find themselves on similar territory as Ibn Khaldun's theory when they discuss conflicting opinions on the nature of civilization, specifically those of Oswald Spengler and Arnold Toynbee.

While the debate here is between cyclical or amendable stages of development, the discussions of relativism should not be forgotten. Like other critiques of the modern era in political philosophy, both men are concerned that humans have boldly sought to master nature where no mastery was to be had. The catalyst for this quest that they fail to identify is the autonomous willful individual, as described in the communitarian critique. The irony that develops in Ratzinger and Pera's exchange is that in fighting a natural progression in civilization development, one might wonder whether the two men are also attempting to conquer nature. If Ratzinger is attempting to master nature, perhaps he is serious about the inferences he makes for re-examining the modern era in the *Crisis* and *Regensburg* events (chapter 5), even though he is likely unaware of this unintended implication. This either suggests that his political thought is shifting by the time he reaches these two events, or it is not a mastery of nature all—instead, it is simply a

counter to the idea that spirituality, specifically Christianity, has become outmoded in the post-modern world.

Chapter Organization and Document Selection

While two of the four documents are not writings by Ratzinger himself, they must be analyzed as a group for two reasons: first, they bring context to what Ratzinger is responding to and progressing toward; second, some of Pera's words can be seen as collateral support for Ratzinger's positions since there are instances in which he simply acknowledges that he agrees on all counts with Pera's view on a particular subject, most notably Pera's attacks on relativism. The four documents, a combination of speeches and letters, were combined into one work, *Without Roots*. This collection is the source material examined in this chapter—the two initial lectures, followed by response letters from each author. The lectures were presented on separate occasions, so neither interlocutor directly addressed the other. Pera's was delivered at the Pontifical Lateran University on May 12, 2004, followed by Ratzinger's one day later in the Capital Room of the Italian Senate. According to Pera in the Preface to *Without Roots*, the similarity of content in the two speeches was pure chance. The two met privately later to discuss their ideas on Europe and the West and decided to exchange letters to clarify and better understand each other's positions. Pera's initial lecture in this collection appears in a revised and longer form than that which was delivered at the university.

This chapter analyzes each of the four works in this exchange, beginning with Pera's lecture and followed by Ratzinger's and the subsequent letters of clarification. The

sections that follow this chapter's introduction are organized in this same order and conclude with a brief discussion of where Ratzinger's political thought is headed. The exchange ends in an impasse, with Pera's state-endorsed non-denominational Christianity standing in contrast to Ratzinger's call for denominational commitment. The weakness of Pera's model begs the question of whether he misses the mark for state neutrality, as the state is perceived as punting morality and judgments to the public, absolving the state from responsibility. Ironically, the state appears nihilistic, and it is not realistic that the state would be able to sustain such a neutral position while protecting both majority and minority interests. This also calls into question how a secularist such as Pera can reconcile his critical view of relativism since the state has absolved itself from certain matters of morality. This observation of Pera is important because it explains why Ratzinger wonders if something more sticky, such as Hellenized Christianity, is needed, and hence, Ratzinger's skepticism of Pera's non-denominational Christianity. By emphasizing the Hellenistic roots of Christianity, Ratzinger begins to set the stage for how the Bible should be interpreted, which circumvents denominational ambiguity. In the end, this places the Church in a unique position as the heir to a Hellenized line of interpretation. The purpose of this chapter is to get to this sticking point, so that the *Crisis* and *Regensburg* events can fill in the specifics of denominational salience.

Pera's Initial Lecture: "Relativism, Christianity, and the West" (May 12, 2004)

Western Paralysis

Marcello Pera's essay, *Relativism, Christianity, and the West*, consists of three parts: 1) the West's relationship with Islam, 2) a refutation of what Pera believes are two philosophical versions of Western relativism, and 3) the consequences of relativism on European identity and its Christian roots. The main thrust of this essay is that the universal nature of the West's institutional inventions has withered at the hands of relativism and paralyzed a civilization from making value judgments, which Pera considers to be the act of taking responsibility when political action is necessary. Judgments can always be made and are bound up in societal definitions and the constraints followed by the players involved. This formula can be applied to any decision, even to conclude that the West's institutions are superior to other models, and therefore it would not be logical to act otherwise. However, the West now faces a great paradox. While the contemporary world widely accepts many Western institutions that claim universality, such as modern science, liberalism, separation of church and state, the rule of law, democracy, and various bill of rights declarations, their universality is now seen as a mere illusion (2–3). Consequently, the West is under attack like never before.

Pera applies his paralysis theory to the West's relationship with Islam and the pushback the West received for asserting its political institutions were superior during the second Iraq war and other military initiatives in the Middle East led by then U.S. president George W. Bush. These actions led to a perception that the United States was

exporting democracy and other Western institutions. Pera denies that this exportation was tantamount to “cultural hegemony” or imperialism (2–3). He points out that most critics who embraced a critical view of “exporting” democracy did so on the simple grounds that the imposition was violent, since those imposed upon possessed an “equally legitimate, worthy, respectable form of life,” rather than drawing on more practical implementation challenges that would make such an application problematic, such as infusing or adapting democratic concepts (voting, laws, parliament, courts, etc.) within a local culture’s history (4). Still, he takes issue with the idea that individuals cannot assert that their “own culture is better or simply preferable” to another, and must out of politeness say that the two cultures and civilizations are different (5). Rejecting this ungrounded politeness—or as Pera calls it, political correctness—is one of the essay’s stated goals. Pera perceives political correctness as a new form of relativism and hypocrisy infecting Western culture with a numbness to act out of fear of appearing rude, even in the face of what one would believe to be evil (6–7). In the political climate in which Pera is writing, he applies this to the issue of whether it is appropriate to say that the Western model of democratic rule is better than an Islamic model that seeks to re-establish Islamic law, the sharia. Pera cautions that the answer would require an evaluation of “better” and that one would have to acknowledge that if such a judgment of a “better” model could be made, it would imply a course of action that would need to be taken. That said, for Pera this is not the case. Instead, he wants to make clear that judgment should not be conflated with action. While this is a nuanced and prudent approach, it seems out of balance with Pera’s premise that the West has failed to act based on its value judgments.

According to Pera, the “dominant culture” in the West thinks that what one “ought” to do descends from the “is.” Pera contends there is an error in logic when one then infers what should be done once such a distinction is made—if one takes the position that “democracy is better than theocracy,” or parallel arguments such as a liberal constitution is better than sharia, or a sentence by an independent tribunal is better than a fatwa—that this means one ought to clash with the other party, which in this case is the Islamic world. One instead should weigh a spectrum of potential actions that range from tolerating, respecting, and dialoguing with Muslims to less friendly actions such as ignoring, obstructing, or eventually clashing with them. Unable to consider a gradation of options, Westerners become paralyzed twice over: once, because this inability self-censors good reasons to believe the Western world can claim better institutions; a second time because if such reasons do exist, it follows that one must act (9–10). Put another way: the first paralysis comes from accepting that there are no merits for making comparisons; the second paralysis comes from inferring that if a comparison is made, it logically follows that one should then act.

It is not quite clear how this argument helps Pera since he argues for a gradation of actions while at the same time criticizes the West for not acting at all. Pera’s veiled prudence eventually lifts in the case of comparing democracy with Islamic law if such a comparison led to escalated circumstances that compromised the West’s security. If offers to dialogue are rejected, or tolerance, peaceful coexistence, and respect are not reciprocated and are instead met with hostility or *jihad*, Pera contends that it would be dangerous to simply respond with self-censorship (10).

Pera sees a connection between this passive and submissive behavior and the rampant spread of relativism and contextual reasoning. He is quite explicit as he declares “unequivocally that cultural critique of universalism has no solid grounds” (11). This stance is important because Ratzinger endorses Pera’s rejection of relativism, and later Pera employs quotations from Ratzinger to support his position. There is a level of civility between the two authors in this regard, but there is a more subtle distance that Ratzinger will place between himself and Pera.

Pera and Meta-Criteria

Without directly mentioning the democracy versus sharia comparison, a parallel is certainly evident, as Pera argues that common meta-criteria are not required for saying that culture A is better than culture B. Rather, taking what seems to be an attempt at employing the Socratic dialogue with analytical philosophy—some might even go so far as to say an unintentional dabbling from the field of philosophy of language—Pera states that the only requirement “is that the members of A and B wish to engage in a dialogue and submit to each other’s criticism.” Through this process, “one interlocutor will run into difficulty defending himself to the other,” and, eventually, a “better” (not necessarily true) position will arise. Often it is simply better or preferable on logical terms since the judgment is the result of weighing “a semantic property of sentences” that creates a stronger position for countering criticisms (13).

As evidence of such a comparison, Pera draws on the example of migration trends from Islamic countries to the West. The idea here is that one does not see stronger

migration patterns from the West to the Islamic world, and this is reason to believe that there is something about the West that makes it clear to assert that A (the West and democracy) is better than B (the Islamic world and sharia). Pera's logic should be questioned though, since the universe of causes for migration flows could be infinite, or at least multivariate. For example, in the case Pera provides, the cause for migration could simply be that it is easier to assimilate into, and participate in a diverse country than in a homogeneously populated one, thus making it a practical, rather than a philosophic matter of comparing the quality of life in a democracy versus one under sharia. It is ironic that Pera is not more aware of this flaw, as later in his essay he discusses the recollections of Fr. Piero Gheddo, who observed (and with similar sentiments as Pera) that in the West mosques are allowed to "flourish right next-door to our parish churches," whereas "in almost no Muslim country are Christians allowed to build a church" (32). Gheddo's argument is quite sweeping and would also take a great amount of data to verify—at what rate have new mosques opened in the West, how have churches grown respectively, in what areas (i.e., homogenous vs. heterogeneous) are mosques opening, have any non-Muslims converted to Islam, etc.? What one sees here is that Pera provides an example that acknowledges the difficulties of establishing a new religious presence, in this case Christianity, in the more homogeneous areas of Muslim countries. The irony is that the separation of church and state provides the conditions for mosques to flourish, making sharia a moot concept in the West. Quantifiable evidence in the form of statistical verification of this migration trend or qualitative surveys of the individuals involved in this migration observation are absent in Pera's essay. This is not to say that his statement on migration trending to the West is not correct, but the lack of

evidence is curious because Pera is aware of the value of facts, which explains why he has set relativism, contextualism, and deconstruction as such high targets, taking aim at Paul Feyerabend, Thomas Kuhn, Nietzsche, and Derrida. His argument is that interpretation and contextual experience for theories are weak because facts outside of a text or situation do exist (21). This is a peculiar position for Pera, for if facts and elements outside of a text, or, say, a situation such as preferring A better to B, do indeed exist, then Pera could use this same line of reasoning to conclude that his own premise that democracy is preferable or better to Islamic law is not so simple as to be reduced to one cause. In short, single-cause analysis as presented in explaining the migration change is limited.

Relativism, Political Malaise, and Democracy

Pera introduces the work of Joseph Ratzinger to draw on a theological-political position against relativism, answering two inquiries once posed by Ratzinger in his work, *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions*: Why is Christianity's "synthesis of reason, faith, and life" no longer convincing? Related, why are Christianity and enlightenment (as in intellectual development) regarded as mutually exclusive? Pera explains that the West lost its belief in "foundations, proofs, justifications, good reasons," and a sense of faith in Revelation. This might explain why Pera also adds that relativism found a home in Christian theology, and acceptance of the plurality of creeds and religions became commonplace. In the end, "hope in meta-criteria" was lost and, eventually, the fundamental creeds of Christianity were placed in doubt (23). Here, Pera

touches on something familiar to the common moral language discussed by MacIntyre in the communitarian critique.

Pera co-opts several quotes and general messaging points from *Truth and Tolerance*, such as the idea “that there is indeed a truth, valid and binding within history itself, in the figure of Jesus Christ and in the faith of the Church.” Pera, like Ratzinger, believes that to embrace this idea is perceived to be akin to submitting to fundamentalism, which the democratic world treats as the “eighth deadly sin.” To avoid this label, people have found it better to play the role of a relativist.

Further borrowing from *Truth and Tolerance*, Pera arrives at the same conclusion as Ratzinger, positing that relativism is “the philosophical basis of democracy” (25). Given the development in Ratzinger’s career in the post-Habermas exchange, one could question the merits of Pera’s citations here. Although they are accurate and clearly represent a time in Ratzinger’s career, the Munich event points to a less rigid Ratzinger than Pera portrays. It is not known if at this time Pera was aware of Ratzinger’s exchange with Habermas, but he does miss the nuance presented in Ratzinger’s Munich work that calls for limitations on religion to avoid fundamentalism. Outside of Pera and Ratzinger’s text, one should question if Pera has conflated tolerance with relativism. Democratic institutions certainly contain such universal standards as Lockean protections for the pursuit of life, liberty, and property put forth in his *Second Treatise*.

One implication of relativism’s infiltration into Christianity that both Pera and Ratzinger see is that it causes believers to engage in self-censorship, since to say that Christ is *the*, or *sole*, truth would be considered “dogmatic and anti-historical,” as well as a form of fundamentalism. Pera calls this approach “contradictory, false, and

counterproductive for Christians.” Here, he hints at the universal nature of some democratic foundations that he ironically uses to levy a claim of falsehood against relativism, citing the value of “individual, dignity, equality, and respect.” The counterproductive charge is based on the idea that dialogue becomes unnecessary if one truth is equivalent to another (26).

Pera also sees another connection between the passive conditions in democratic countries and the cultural and political malaise that he observes in the West, as people are fearful and unsure of acting. As Pera puts it: “Relativism has debilitated our Christian defense and prepared or inclined us for surrender. It has convinced us that there is nothing worth fighting for or risking” (38).

Ultimately, what Pera wants is dialogue among parties, with the hope that an open discussion will help them to find some common meta-criteria to build from. Pera concludes his essay by indicating that he is not “advocating a Western declaration of war” but rather wants a dialogue with those from Islamic countries who “wish to live in peaceful coexistence with the West.” However, Pera sets conditions for this dialogue: both parties cannot enter into talks believing that “one idea is as good as the other” (45). This reveals a key contingency in what dialogue means for Pera: to enter a dialogue means that parties are putting out their ideas to test and are open to the possibility that one of the parties may need to concede after its position is either falsified or proven to be the lesser of the options. What is not clear is whether Pera views the option of a hybrid idea between A and B. For him, there seems to be an “either-or” outcome. Through dialogue, one might view Pera’s conditions as the common language and points of reference (common meta-criteria) needed for thought-bargaining.

Ratzinger's Initial Address: "The Spiritual Roots of Europe" (May 13, 2004)

The Sacred

Whereas Pera's essay is concerned with political malaise, Ratzinger addresses a different malaise, a cultural one that neutralizes European identity. Bound up in this discussion is the modern movement's effect on Europe, which brings with it the ideological baggage of relativism. One goal of Ratzinger's essay is to establish a definition of Europe not geographically, but rather culturally and historically (52). That said, a large portion of the essay is a European history lesson on the continent's cultural backbone, which Ratzinger believes can only be supported by a *sense of the sacred*—this is the most important concept advanced in this essay, and finds itself perfectly situated within the communitarian critique, as it speaks to identity, narrative, the role of reason in autonomy for individual Europeans, and, ultimately, social cohesion. The value Ratzinger places on monasticism helps to understand what he means by sacred. Contingent to any society throughout history is monasticism, which he describes as serving as an “indispensable bearer not only of cultural continuity but above all of fundamental religious and moral values, the ultimate guidance of humankind.” In addition, it is a “pre-political and supra-political force” necessary for the “rebirths of culture and civilization” (55–56). This is delving into the core roots of a culture or civilization to discover what it held most high in terms of values, mores, and codes of conduct, and how this might be intertwined with religious beliefs.

Through Ratzinger's history lesson, he hopes to reveal the formation of Europe's modern era and its legacy, marking it as a critical point of examination for his call to

contemporary Europeans. He seeks to convince his audience that two measures are needed for preserving European identity in an era of multiculturalism: 1) to absorb the rationalism of the modern era back into the Church and 2) to embrace Europe's heritage of *the sacred*. The latter goal is patently clear, while the first is less transparent and only noticeable through a more careful reading and is informed by the next chapter's coverage of the *Crisis* and *Regensburg* events.

Ratzinger believes a multitude of factors virtually wiped out *a sense of the sacred* from Europe: rationalism of the modern era, which elevated reason to the lone guiding principle for all aspects of life; the rise of technosecular culture in the West; Europeans looking to non-European countries for spirituality; and multiculturalism—a final wave that washed away pride for and knowledge of European history. This makes Ratzinger sound similar to Pera; however, it should be noted that it is not so easy to classify Ratzinger as a critic of multiculturalism, for he is indeed a proponent of the concept, at least with regard to the European side of the bargain in cultural exchange. What Ratzinger takes issue with is the inability of Europeans to live up to their side of multiculturalism's implicit exchange. As he sees it, multiculturalism demands that Europeans fulfill an obligation to understand their own history, and they are failing at this task, undermining the very principle of multiculturalism that they hold in such high regard.

European Shifts and the Modern Era

Three landmark moments occurred during the beginning of the European modern era, according to Ratzinger: 1) geo-political boundary shifts, including the breakup of the

ancient Mediterranean continent which relocated populations farther north, the establishment of a Latin Western territory, and the transition from the ancient Roman Empire to Byzantium; 2) the division of Europe into two separate worlds, Germanic Protestant and Latin Catholic; and 3) the French Revolution. While the first moment largely consisted of nuts and bolts changes such as boundary shifts and power redistribution, it made sustaining a continental social glue a challenging task from a practical perspective. The second moment imposed roadblocks to thinking and relating to one another as further divisions within Christianity were created (59–60). The third moment—the French Revolution—shattered the spiritual framework that Europe provided and formed itself by extracting divine and spiritual elements from the public sphere and governmental bodies and then replacing them with reason alone. Both politics and ideals were changed: God no longer preceded history; the state was seen as purely secular, “grounded in rationalism and the will of the citizens”; and God became an issue relegated to the private sphere and irrelevant to the “democratic formation of the public will” (62–63). In removing God and religion from the public sphere, one could say that not only was common language scrapped, but that the ability to create anchors and reference points to tether pure reason also were cut. In MacIntyre terms, this is described as:

In a world of secular rationality religion could no longer provide such a shared background and foundation for moral discourse and action; and the failure of philosophy to provide what religion could no longer furnish was an important cause of philosophy losing its central cultural role and becoming a marginal, narrowly academic subject (50).

Ratzinger identifies the French Revolution as a crucial stage in the rise of relativism and goes on to demonstrate the political impact the Enlightenment had on

Europe. The effects of such Enlightenment figures as Hume and Voltaire are an unstated, or at the least an insufficiently challenged, presence in Ratzinger's criticisms of relativism in this exchange. Hume's "association of ideas"—a concept even noted by Pera in a quick swipe at Nozick and Rawls³⁷—is the internal symbolic method that Ratzinger is up against from a very basic socio-psychological standpoint. Hume's emphasis on impressions and perceptions contributed to the removal of values and standards (Hill 1987). Voltaire provided his own libertarian genesis in France and had a role in advancing empirical skepticism and Newtonian sciences as influential forces in the European intellect (Shank 2008), and this action looms as part of an understood disapproval of the era. Neither Hume nor Voltaire is taken to task by Ratzinger in the Pera exchange or later in the *Crisis of Cultures* address, in which the Enlightenment is spoken about in regard to Kant. While his focus on Kant does help to position Ratzinger within the communitarian critique's focus on deontological liberalism, there is a notable absence of Enlightenment figures such as Hume and Voltaire, considering Ratzinger aligns himself with this movement. The identification of this omission is admittedly from a political theory slice of this movement, and does not unhinge Ratzinger's broader argument regarding the use of reason, but it is an example of the multi-dimensional nature of the Enlightenment in that it touched politics, philosophy and science. It is also worth noting that Ratzinger may have glossed over Voltaire altogether due to the hedonistic nature of his work.

In reading Ratzinger's history lesson on Europe and modern rationalism, one must question if he is simply reporting observable facts or preparing a treatment for the

³⁷ See p. 34 of Pera's first essay in *Without Roots* (2005 [2006]).

continent's spiritual malaise by looking at its causes. This essay does not present a more overarching solution that incorporates reason—this end is better presented in the Habermas encounter—but Ratzinger does put forth several ideas for recapturing European identity that include re-examining and possibly absorbing the Enlightenment. When Ratzinger addresses reason in other works, it is to show that reason and faith are not mutually exclusive concepts for political design, and he is aware of other Christian denominations that were able to reach a balance between these two concepts. For example, his history lesson recognizes that Protestant Christianity “was initially able to accommodate liberal, [E]nlightenment ideas without jeopardizing the framework of a broad Christian consensus” (63). If other segments of Christianity were able to achieve some sort of balance, why not the Roman Catholic tradition? The *Crisis* and *Regensburg* events build on this idea and provide a specific mechanism for this balance in the European context—embracing the Enlightenment and promoting Hellenized Christianity—but this essay explains this by looking at spirituality in Asia, Africa, and the Islamic world. While secular thinking has begun to enter public life in these areas, their local religious institutions have not diminished. In fact, the opposite effect has taken place—“Islam has been reborn” and the mysticism of Buddhism has been elevated as a spiritual power. There is a hint of admiration by Ratzinger here, especially with regard to Islam's rebirth, which he partially attributes to the new material wealth acquired by Islamic countries but even more to “people's conviction that Islam can provide a valid spiritual foundation to their lives.” Europe, by contrast, has lost its foundation, despite its political and economic power, leaving Ratzinger to ask:

[W]hat is European culture, and what has remained of it? Is European culture perhaps nothing more than the technology and trade civilization that has marched

triumphantly across the planet? Or is it instead a post-European culture born on the ruins of the ancient European cultures? (64–65)

Ratzinger's answer is that technology is replacing Western spirituality, leaving Europeans searching elsewhere in the world for value systems and mysticism (66). One could also infer that reason and rationality are bound up in this explanation since they are a driver for technology.

Healing Cultural Malaise

Ratzinger's prescription for Europe's spiritual malaise begins with an investigation into theoretical explanations of the history of civilizations. He examines two opposing viewpoints—those of Oswald Spengler and Arnold Toynbee. Spengler's theory is a determinism that asserts it has found a natural law to explain the lifecycle of any civilization's cultural history. On the subject of cultural birth, Ratzinger summarizes Spengler's critical moments as “gradual rise, flourishing, slow decline, aging and death.” Cultural demise is seen as inevitable, and Spengler predicts the West will eventually experience this fate as well. The most it can hope for is to pass down the best of its culture to the next generation. Toynbee presents an alternative to this fatalistic outlook, believing that one has to differentiate between technological progress and spiritual development. As Ratzinger interprets Toynbee (and agrees with him), spiritualization is “true progress.” In reading Ratzinger's interpretation of Toynbee, a parallel emerges with Ratzinger's critique of technology and culture at large. He co-opts Toynbee's charge that Europe's cultural crisis is the result of secularism and manifested itself when, as

Ratzinger describes, “the cult of technology, nationalism, and militarism” replaced religion (67–68).

Ratzinger covers his tracks to not explicitly state who he sides with but he seems taken with the idea that by identifying the cause of the illness, it will lead to a cure, since he wonders whether Europeans will need to determine which parts of their heritage will help secure a future (68). These determinations will bring about the synthesis (the “religious dimension”) and mark the beginning of the *sense of a sacred*. Ratzinger’s attraction to the prospect that the re-introduction of Western Christian heritage is the answer to Europe’s cultural malaise and identity crisis also suggests he gravitates toward Toynbee. If Toynbee is correct, Ratzinger urges Europeans to consider reintroducing a “religious dimension” that would be “a synthesis of residual Christianity and the religious heritage of humankind” (68). Ratzinger’s interpretation of the Spengler-Toynbee debate is important because he demonstrates that he believes Europe can correct its course. One need not take the Spengler route and simply let the cultural pieces fall as they may. How feasible this is remains to be seen, but if European identity can be steered back on course, it should be possible to see where secularism inserted itself and look for a new system to change the intellectual and cultural environment of Europe. Ratzinger’s position is important to note here since his refusal to accept the inevitability of civilization’s decline is another contribution to his battle with obsolescence.

Reason and Social Solidarity

The antidote for Europe’s cultural malaise, Ratzinger believes, can be found in the role reason has played in Europe’s history. After the French Revolution, a secular model

of government arose that distinguished state from religion, leaving religion for the private sphere and removing its relevance from the state's foundation altogether. By removing religion and any remnants of spiritualism, the state was constructed on reason alone. Ratzinger's criticism of secular systems is that "since reason is inherently fragile," they are "easy targets for dictatorships." As evidence, he points to the collapse of Prussian State Christianity and rise of the Nazi Party that followed in Germany (69).

Ratzinger goes on to discuss the two forms of socialism that emerged in Europe in the nineteenth century: one totalitarian and other democratic. He considers democratic socialism very close to Catholic social doctrine, and even goes so far as to say that it "made a remarkable contribution to the formation of a social consciousness." However, he is not so kind to the totalitarian model, linking it to materialism and an aesthetic, deterministic view of history that lowered the collective bar for moral standards:

Depending on circumstance, anything can become legitimate and even necessary; anything can become moral in the new sense of the term. Even humankind itself can be treated as an instrument, since the individual does not matter, only the future, the cruel deity adjudicating over one all (72–73).

The totalitarian model becomes that which is atheistic and materialist. Ratzinger is certainly taking a position held in some circles of political philosophy, namely, that the Enlightenment undermined itself, which begs the question: Why does he return to this era and link it to Christ? While this connection is missing in this essay, it can be seen in other philosophical output of the Church, such as that handed down in Pope John Paul II's encyclical, *Fides et Ratio*, and from Ratzinger himself, as seen in his essay in *Dialectics of Secularization* and in the *Regensburg Lecture*. *Fides* develops a reciprocal relationship between theology and reason/philosophy that treats Christian revelation as the ultimate

clarifier for philosophy and truth. *Dialectics* is a bit more progressive, viewing faith and reason as purifiers of one another, while *Regensburg* ties the scientific ethos of the modern era to obedience and to the patient, diligent, and logical pursuit of discovering truth.

To demonstrate the triangular relationship among reason, democracy, and religion, Ratzinger looks outside of Europe at a similar secular model proliferated at the expense of the Church. The “free churches” of the United States, as Ratzinger calls them, possess the ability “to create a moral consensus and form a democratic public will.” As a result, even American Catholics have:

incorporated the traditions of the free church regarding the relationship between Church and politics, believing that a Church that is separate from the state better guarantees the moral foundation of the country. Hence the promotion of the democratic ideal is seen as a moral duty that is in profound compliance with the faith (70–71).

The reader can only think that Ratzinger is highlighting these misfortunes to imply the Church should have better incorporated the new role of modern rationalism into its doctrine.

Reconciling European Identity with Multiculturalism

While Ratzinger understands the dangers of absolutism, commitment to ideals is important for constructing a European identity. One vehicle for this identity is the European Constitution, though Ratzinger says that it is missing three basic moral elements central to European identity: 1) unconditional, pre-political human rights; 2) marriage and family; and 3) religion.

The first element, human rights and dignity, which also include broad rights such as freedom and equality, are unconditional and precede the state, belonging to a higher order. This category also includes solidarity. Because these rights cannot be altered, Ratzinger calls them the “the true guarantee of freedom” and demonstrations of “human greatness,” as well as “crucial to European identity.” Similar to his views on faith—seen as a living organism in the previous chapter—what sustains these principles is a “corresponding moral conscience that is in a state of constant renewal” (74–76). The constant renewal aspect of these rights helps Ratzinger solidify why a strong identity is needed for helping individuals to continue to believe in them and maintain a common language to do so.

The third element of European identity, religion, is described as “fundamental to all cultures: respect for that which another group holds sacred, especially respect for the sacred in the highest sense, for God, which one can reasonably expect to find even among those who are not willing to believe in God.” The role of religion in society is crucial for Ratzinger, as he believes that when respect for religion is “violated in a society, something essential is lost” (78).

With these missing elements put forth, one must wonder: What is now to be done on a continent that consists of not only diverse viewpoints in homogenous groups, but also a growing sub-population of immigrants? Ratzinger’s answer is twofold: first, Europeans need to accept and embrace their history if they are to accept others, and second, a common base across cultures is the recognition of *a sense of the sacred*, even when the cultures are greatly different. Put another way, the common base is dependent

on self-discovery and learning about other cultures. There is an idea that in doing so some sort of universal principle(s) will be discovered.

Ratzinger is not going to reject multiculturalism, so he must figure out how to interact with it, as well as how to address the issue of pluralism in general, since these are the biggest challenges to social solidarity. Homogeneous societies are rare in the West, so he settles for *the sacred* as a rescue. He commends the West for “trying to be more open, to be more understanding of the values of outsiders”; however, he believes “it has lost all capacity for self-love.” Ratzinger is not inferring a causation here, namely, that openness to multiculturalism leads to a lack of self-love, but he believes that the West has reached a point at which it views its history as “despicable and...destructive” (78–79). This is a mental roadblock the West has created to appreciating its own gifts and heritage. The danger is that if Europe does not embrace its own heritage of the sacred, it not only fails to provide an identity for its people, but it also cheats the principle of multiculturalism (79–80).

Multiculturalism cannot survive without a respect for common foundations and *the sacred*. There must be a balance, for multiculturalism becomes self-defeating if faith and heritage are lost. One way to interpret this is that Ratzinger is charging that the West is not living up with its end of the bargain in a multicultural society. He explains this as:

Multiculturalism teaches us to approach the sacred things of others with respect, but we can only do this if we, ourselves, are not estranged from the sacred, from God. We can and we must learn from that which is sacred to others. With regard to others, it is our duty to cultivate within ourselves respect for the sacred and to show the face of the revealed God, of the God who has compassion for the poor and the weak, for widows and orphans, for the foreigner... (79).

Pera's Response to Ratzinger

Pera's letter to Ratzinger attempts to harmonize the senator's secularist viewpoint with that of believers. The letter advocates constructing a form of Christianity to serve as a civil, non-denominational religion, resulting in what Ratzinger sees as an odd connection since Christianity relies on faith and commitment to specificity rather than a half promise. A related glaring irony for Pera's civil religion emerges, as he desires a detailed description of European identity, possibly even in a vehicle such as the European Union's Charter, while also advocating a generic, non-denominational civil religion. Aside from Ratzinger's concern that one would even commit to such a broad form of religion, Pera's construction becomes a denomination itself—a Christian sect as deemed relevant and acceptable by the state. While Pera does set a demarcation between the state and its religion, he doesn't indicate at what point the state would intervene if the religion became corrupted. Therefore, there is a passive state endorsement here rather than the hands-off approach he describes. One might say this civil religion possesses similar aims of solidarity as Ratzinger's quest to discover *the sacred*, except that Ratzinger's endeavor is larger than simply religion since it seeks out anthropological and philosophical forms, the great movers that firm up a particular religion. In Ratzinger's system, Christianity would be a subset of a larger group or cultural phenomena. Pera agrees with Ratzinger that there are "founding moral elements" that should be included in the EU's Charter to help sustain European identity and "not merely a list of principles, values, and institutions" (83). This may explain the ambiguous nature of Pera's civil religion.

Pera's response letter is primarily concerned with what he sees as flaws in the European Constitution and how this could determine an undesirable fate for Europe. The

flaws begin with Europe's Charter of Fundamental Rights, which he says offers only vague descriptions of European identity and its "spiritual and moral heritage." More precision is needed to locate common connections among European citizens, which he sees as a "Christian Europe" rather than an equivocal "religious Europe" (84).

Pera charges that Europe's failure to draft a true constitution—one that includes a declaration of Christian identity as its common spirit—is due to an "an epidemic of relativism" whereby all cultures are treated as equivalent. Pera believes European nations refuse to judge others because "to accept and defend one's own culture would be an act of hegemony, of intolerance, that betrayed an anti-democratic, anti-liberal, disrespectful attitude toward the autonomy of other populations and individuals" (85–86). His understanding of multiculturalism is different than that of Ratzinger's, for Pera sees it through the lens of victimization, whereas Ratzinger's approach calls on Europe to live up to its side of the bargain in multicultural exchanges. Both share the idea that Europe's lack of identity will lead to its demise, but Pera sees this as pacifism that thwarts self-preservation, whereas Ratzinger views it as a breakdown of moral language in a civilization's *sense of the sacred*.

If Europe has failed to act, Pera wants to know what Christian believers can do to correct the course Europe has taken for more than two centuries. Pera, like Ratzinger, adopts Toynbee's notion of creative minorities as instrumental to rejuvenating a culture and applies it to Christians in spiritual and philosophical terms. While European Christians are far from being classified as a numerical minority, Pera believes they are ideologically alone.

Christians at large play a pivotal role in shaping Pera's non-denominational Christianity through its decentralized administrative structure, as this system calls for more monasteries run by monks than central churches led by church officials. Pera's civil religion is an effort to balance both the public and private spheres of life so as to avoid compromising the principle of church-state separation. The state carves out a space for a civil religion—this is its only guarantee, as it stays hands-off from there. This space allows Pera's proposed civil religion to work its ways by “instill[ing] its values throughout the long chain that goes from the individual to the family, groups, associations, the community, and civil society, *without* passing through the political parties, government programs, and force of states” (95–96).

Christians cannot do this alone, however. Non-believers are needed, though it is not entirely clear what their role is unless it is viewed as one of a conscience to those who buy into the concept of a civil religion. Pera's model of a civil religion fails unless it can accommodate non-believers by either finding them a role in the state or creating a civil religion in a way that allows for tolerance. Since the state is hands-off, the likelihood of tolerance is perceived to be greater. One should question whether this is really a tongue-in-cheek act, a religious-institutional version of the noble lie advocated by Socrates in Plato's *Republic*. Socrates speaks of fostering solidarity within a city by crafting a tale in which a god is believed to have fashioned rulers with a mixture of gold at birth, auxiliaries in silver, and farmers and other craftsmen in iron and bronze (Book II, section 415). Pera's civil religion similarly takes on the form of the noble lie in that it requires non-believers to either participate or go along with the charade. Those participating in the civil religion also live the charade, as the true intention is not of higher aspirations, but

one of a pragmatic, sustainable peace. Part of the noble lie, according to Leo Strauss, is to make citizens forget the true character of their citizenship, demanding that they regard themselves as part of the same group, family, and land or particular city (1964, 102). The true nature of Pera's civil religion, namely, political equilibrium, is covert.

When the views of secularists and believers conflict over issues of morality, it is often rooted in the origins of their values, according to Pera. For secularists, values are constructed through human efforts, whereas believers derive their values from revelation provided by God (98). As a self-described secularist, one should question if this can be reconciled with Pera's earlier attacks on relativism and subjectivism, for if values are constructed it should logically follow that differing, even competing, values could find themselves at times equally legitimate. This is what Pera says led to Europe's paralysis—accepting all positions as equals stifles political action. This is a curious line of reasoning, since it is a denial of relativity even as it uses a social baseline to make value judgments. The best explanation Pera offers is that non-believers play the role of a societal conscience based solely on a logic that draws on a romanticism of intellectuals—such as Plato, Spinoza, Leibniz, and Kant—who found a way to integrate a mathematical nature to their approach to philosophy and ethics (104–105).

Pera uses abortion as an example of this scientific approach and how the origins between secularists and believers differ but reach similar conclusions. If personhood cannot be understood as an empirical concept, “but rather [as] an axiologically loaded one, . . . from a philosophical and moral point of view, we must take a position that an embryo is a person from the moment of conception” (102). The understanding here is that the idea of “personhood” lacks real scientific criteria. There is no threshold at which

science says a being has definitively become sentient. To intervene once conception has begun could be considered an irrational act for the secularist. While the subject of abortion relates very little to identity other than the role relativism plays in settling the issue, it is important to highlight Pera's line of reasoning here since it is repeated by Ratzinger in his response to Pera. The position developed by both authors sets aside the abstract position of religion that often asserts life from the moment of conception in favor of non-metaphysical logic that the believer, non-believer, or agnostic can employ. For the political philosopher, the subject of abortion often becomes a base and problematic issue to resolve depending on how one constructs or discovers his/her first principles regarding the existence of God, a higher ordering, the soul, and the concept of personhood, though it does find itself situated within the idea of self-autonomy. Abortion is connected to the critique of self-autonomy, depending on whose autonomy is in question—that of the dependent being or that of the provider. It's also loosely connected to Taylor's discussion of sentient beings and how society ought to be set up to allow these creations to thrive.

Ratzinger's Response to Pera

Ratzinger's letter takes on Pera's idea of a non-denominational Christian civil religion, illustrating the difficulties of implementing such a concept for two main reasons: 1) denomination is needed to be truly faithful and 2) communities naturally evolve themselves and in a way that contains a history that cannot be forgotten. The letter also describes the complex relationships between the Church and various Christian groups, delineating between "free" Christians and other groups. Just as important, this letter

contributes additional insights into Ratzinger's understanding of the Enlightenment and democracy. His earlier ideas on multiculturalism and tolerance are pushed further by positioning them in the realm of dogma—relativism becomes intolerance, for it prescribes itself as *the* way of thinking. Lastly, in a demonstration that resembles Pera's own secularist viewpoint, Ratzinger restates an approach to abortion advocated by the Church that is less grounded in faith, and based more in logic, ethics, and law, ultimately reflecting a re-alignment between the Church and the rationalism of the Enlightenment and its legacies.

Christian Consensus: America vs. Europe

Pera's civil religion reminds Ratzinger of Alexis de Tocqueville's analysis of religion in America's early years, as described in *Democracy in America*. During that time, American democracy functioned well because Protestant Christianity was the assumed "spiritual foundation." Religious and moral convictions did not have to be defined. At the same time, the country managed to foster an environment in which "no single denomination dominated public life." This unique combination of religious freedom and social solidarity is what both Ratzinger and Pera are wrestling with. For Pera, it is how to create a government-guaranteed space for a non-denominational Christianity, since he regards this as Europe's foundation when obvious differences among denominations exist. For Ratzinger, it is a cultural sacredness, a greater underlying common denominator. Despite its own accelerated secularization, Ratzinger still believes there is an implicit and clear understanding in the United States of its

Christian roots that is far greater than in Europe. Ratzinger warns that Europe is on a “collision course with its own history” when it denies “any possible public dimension for Christian values” (108–109).

Ratzinger wants to know why Europe cannot achieve a similar consensus. He believes the difference rests in the founding of the United States, which demanded separation of church and state, allowing various religions to congregate and thrive. This developed what Ratzinger calls a “free church model.” He writes:

American society was built for the most part by groups that had fled from the system of state churches that reigned in Europe, and they found their religious communities outside of the state church. The foundations of American society were thus laid by the free churches, which by the tenets of their creed and their very structure are not a state church but rather a free assembly of individuals (110).

A complimentary explanation to what Ratzinger is observing here via Tocqueville can be found in Louis Hartz’s *The Liberal Tradition in America* (1955). Hartz’s thesis that socialist movements found acceptance difficult in the United States due to the new land’s lack of a feudalistic past like that of Europe might also explain why free churches prospered in the American religious landscape. The insertion of Tocqueville into this discussion is quite interesting for two reasons. First, the analysis of individualism provided by Tocqueville in *Democracy in America* can be thought of as a precursor to contemporary communitarian theory’s outlook on individualism; second, there are some striking comparisons between Ratzinger’s *sense of the sacred* and Tocqueville’s understandings of the “social state” and mores.

Tocqueville observed a culture of atomism developing during the early years of the United States. He equates individualism in U.S. democracy as a new version of

“egoism,” calling it a “a calm and considered feeling which disposes each citizen to isolate himself from the mass of his fellows and withdraw into the circle of family and friends; with this little society formed to his taste, he gladly leaves the greater society to look after itself” (Vol. II, part 2, chapter 2). One can see from this how social attachments came to be at a disadvantage in the United States. If Ratzinger is aware of the deeper themes in *Democracy*, Tocqueville’s critique of the atomized self could be an influence on him and explain some of the similarities between Ratzinger’s views and those of the communitarian critique concerning social obligation and extreme individualism.

A second point of interest in regard to Tocqueville begins with his opening of the chapter, “Social State of the Anglo-Americans,” in *Democracy*. Tocqueville writes:

The social state is commonly the result of circumstances, sometimes of laws, but most often a combination of the two. But once it has come into being, it may itself be considered the prime cause of most of the laws, customs, and ideas which control the nation’s behavior; it modifies even those things which it does not cause. Therefore one must first study their social state if one wants to understand a people’s laws and mores (Vol. I, part 1, chapter 3).

While the social state is not entirely analogous to *a sense of the sacred*, the *sacred* is bound up in the social state in that it is part of a community’s customs and mores. One might look at this as the intellectual foundation on which any group rests. In Western democracies such as the United States, the challenge is that religion, including related philosophical issues, can be interwoven into the history of customs, even as separation of church and state is essential in a democracy. For Tocqueville, citizens must be tolerant, and mores determine the successful maintenance of a democratic republic such as the United States. In fact, he calls mores “the habits of the heart” and “the different notions possessed by men, the various opinions current among them, and the sum of ideas that shape mental habits.”

Tocqueville discusses the differences between Catholics and Protestants as examples of mores at that early time in America. He regards Catholics as loyal and friends of democracy, calling them the “most republican and democratic of all the classes” in the early United States. They were obedient, whereas Protestants were highly independent. Even with this difference, however, no single religion in the United States was hostile to its democratic and republican institutions, and “[a]ll the clergy there speak the same language; opinions are in harmony with the laws, and there is, so to say, only one mental current” (Vol. I. part II, chapter 9).³⁸

Ratzinger sees another example of the differences between the public (state)-private sphere relationships of the United States and Europe in how each treats cultural institutions, which in the United States are mostly nongovernmental and left to the stewardship of universities or private organizations that support the arts (111). In total, this comparative lesson between the United States and Europe is designed to set up why Pera’s civil religion is not likely to succeed in contemporary Europe. The inference here is that Christianity has thrived longer in the United States than in Europe due to the nongovernmental nature of cultural institutions. Ratzinger may want to be cautious here if his goal is to preserve history and culture. American Catholic scholar and theologian Ernest L. Fortin regarded the Founding Fathers’ separation of church and state as an unintended removal of America’s own sacred conceptions. These Founding Fathers did not intend to remove religion from public life, only the wars it caused, yet the notion of the separation of church and state extended to the point where religion began to be

³⁸ See pp. 287–289 of the subsection titled “Religion Considered as a Political Institution and How It Powerfully Contributes to the Maintenance of a Democratic Republic among the Americans” in Vol. I, part II, chapter 9.

separated from society altogether. As a result, Fortin contends (and sounds very much like Ratzinger in doing so): “The signs of the sacred are gradually disappearing from our midst, and our cities continue to take on an ever more secular aspect (Fortin 1991, 274). Despite this disappearance—and this should be noted as something with which Ratzinger himself would agree—he still believes American Catholicism is a model for fostering church and state separation.

Yet something does not sit well with this comparison, unless Ratzinger is asserting that American Catholics have been able to tread water above the hyper-evolving nature of free churches in the United States and remain anchored in their traditions. One possible explanation for his stance is the stability and meticulous nature of the Church to slowly assess itself before changing, since Ratzinger believes that radical transformations are common in the Protestant world, but the Catholic Church maintains a universal and unchanging nature. His charge is that Protestant communities continuously adapt to the secularized world, and, in doing so, lose “their internal cohesion and their ability to persuade” (112). This point is no doubt raised for application to Pera’s non-denominational Christianity. One is to infer here that it is harder for a church to stand by universal principles when churches so easily reinvent themselves over time. Another potential and possibly simpler interpretation is that the obedient nature of Catholics, as already noted by Tocqueville, along with their understanding of subsidiarity—the principle allowing the lowest ranking or competent entity in a decentralized government to handle particular matters—bodes well with the spirit of local autonomy required by democratic republics.

The Catholic/Protestant division is also discussed by Ratzinger, as he notes that after the Reformation, Europe was split into two spiritual groups—one Catholic, the other Protestant—which would come to be reflected later in the European colonies in the New World. Reformed churches were established as state churches, partly because the Reformation was introduced by monarchs. In contrast, the Catholic system aimed to be universal without association to any particular state. The Church’s reach and community would then be much broader, living in all nations. The effect this has is that “[i]t creates a community—above and beyond loyalty to one’s own country—that spreads beyond national borders” (114–115).

Ratzinger highlights another difference between Protestantism and Catholicism in the way each received the Enlightenment: “While the Enlightenment proclaimed autonomy of reason and its emancipation from traditional faith, the Catholic Church remained strongly attached to its heritage of faith, thereby locking the two in endless conflict” (115). In contrast, a kinship formed between the Enlightenment and Protestantism in the eighteenth century and still stands today (117).

Protestantism as a whole has also been better able to intertwine itself with modern culture; however, Ratzinger notes, “This is both its strength and its weakness” as it “conform[s] to the times” (118). So, while free churches attract a great deal of members, Ratzinger contends that they lose followers as they “adapt themselves to the standards of secularization.” In other words, they can get close to the Enlightenment, but not too close.

Although this calls into question the universality of a church and its objectivity, one wonders how an institution such as the Catholic Church should conduct itself as the world changes since this seems to be an issue Ratzinger is wrestling with as he talks

about declines in membership. Ratzinger believes churches are most attractive when they have “a solid point of reference and a clear orientation.” Therefore, the concept of a “global ethos” or even a civil religion becomes ambiguous and “no more than a reflection of the majority’s convictions,” resulting in something with little or no meaning (119–120). So here again, Ratzinger is calling for particularity, but at the same time hoping to sustain a universality.

When Secularists Live with Believers

If a civil religion will fail due to a lack of strong reference points, Ratzinger offers his own path on how Christians can salvage their faith via four theses: 1) creative minorities within the Christian faith should be called upon to convincingly lead by example; 2) there is a human need for communities and they evolve themselves; 3) groups need a defined foundation, one that is divine and “duty bound”; and 4) secularists, Catholics, seekers, and believers can learn from one another (120–124). The first three theses have already been discussed in detail in the Pera exchange. The fourth thesis is markedly noteworthy since it connects to the Habermas exchange and shows that Ratzinger sees a role for secularists. Ideologically, they are clearly different from the Catholic world, but he believes the parties can learn from one another. He encourages secularists and Catholics, seekers and believers to move toward each other with a new openness. Ratzinger sees each of these groups as traveling on separate paths pursuing a similar end, namely, truth, and through their interactions they can learn from one another. Ratzinger is even sympathetic to secularists and says that their curiosity and pursuit of

truth should be admired and seen in a similar light as the Catholic approach to knowledge acquisition:

Secular people are not a rigid block. They do not constitute a set denomination, or worse, an “anti-denomination.”... Very often they are people who passionately seek truth, who are pained by the lack of truth in humankind. Consequently they return to the essential contents of culture and faith, and through their commitment often make these contents even more luminous than an unquestioned faith, accepted more out of habit than out of the sufferings of the conscience (123–124).

The Unpersuasive Salesman: Christianity

There are two main reasons why Christianity’s model for life is becoming unconvincing, according to Ratzinger. First, people are not compelled to join through an open calling. For example, he notes that the Christian model of life does little to offer “a livable alternative to the increasingly vacuous entertainments of leisure-time society” (125–126). Christianity is at a real disadvantage here. On one hand, as Ratzinger suggests, it is too passive in its calling, but on the other hand, it cannot be coercive. This is important to highlight here because this is where the narrative method of the communitarian critique is of value to Ratzinger. The act of choice is also relevant, as the Church will need to position itself as representing recognizable principles.

The second reason Christianity has become unconvincing is that science has surpassed Christianity. The life of a Christian is now archaically viewed as “out-of-step with the rationalism of the modern era.” With science also comes the value of observation. Hence the credibility of the Bible’s divine origins is questioned, and as such the Christian faith is demoted to myth. The conditions of this new intellectual environment have made it difficult for people to be Christians (126). In other words,

Christianity is seen as a non-functional way of life in recent times.

Religion and philosophy are not capable of replacing modern science, but they can play a role in addressing some of the big questions that overlap these seemingly mutually exclusive fields of study—the metaphysical and the observable. By placing them together, Ratzinger hopes that the divided European identity can be repaired. This distinction is not limited to the division caused by the Reformation, but also addresses an even greater division between secularists and the faithful at large. Particularly, this would mean understanding tough questions from the perspectives of both science and philosophy. Ratzinger poses these as: “Does matter create reason? Does pure chance produce meaning? Or do the intellect, logos, and reason come first, so that reason, freedom, and the good are already part of the principles that construct reality?” (127)

Rationalism Resurfaced

From the previous chapter that focused on the Habermas exchange, it is clear that Ratzinger believes faith and reason should place limitations on one another to avoid dangerous absolutisms. With Ratzinger’s letter to Pera, it can be inferred that dangerous absolutisms now include both religious fundamentalism and relativism. He tells Pera that he is most grateful for his lecture’s criticism of relativism. Ratzinger acknowledges that they are in complete agreement with one another on this matter, declaring that as relativism increasingly becomes the “generally accepted way of thinking, the more it tends toward intolerance, thereby becoming a new dogmatism.” The danger posed by relativism is that as it becomes the required norm, traditional values are labeled as

intolerance. Ratzinger offers a strong call to arms as he states that “it is vital to oppose this imposition of a new pseudo-enlightenment, which threatens freedom of thought as well as freedom of religion” (128).

Toward the end of Ratzinger’s letter he takes a brief detour to address bioethical issues raised by Pera, making clear it will only be a few brief remarks, but nevertheless he emphasizes that his comments are relevant to understanding how both secularists and Catholics have reached similar positions. It is a highly sensitive issue that involves balancing beliefs of the personal sphere with the public sphere of choice, where a common, equitable ground must be found to make non-arbitrary choices for all participants. Ratzinger appreciates Pera’s unique position as a secularist to speak of the “person from the moment of conception” and his understanding of “the deep ethical difference between the relationship with persons and the relationship with things.” He notes that the Church’s Magisterium detailed a similar position when deciding how far the Church should press its anti-abortion demands on lawmakers. The Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith prepared a document that outlined the responsibilities of Catholic politicians in tackling the issue of abortion in their public service. The document informed Catholic lawmakers that they should not make laws that would “impose a hierarchy of values that can only be recognized and enacted within the faith.” Instead, they should only legislate based on what belongs to “human foundations accessible to reason and therefore essential to the construction of a sound legal order” (129).

Rather than insert a theological argument that either life or a soul begins from the moment of conception due to evidence through divine gifts such as the Bible, Ratzinger here calls on a more scientific approach to settle the abortion issue: “no experimental

datum will ever be sufficient proof of the existence of a spiritual soul” (131). Hence, the claim that a soul exists cannot be falsified. Further, since an individual is an empirical term used to describe “an organism...completely dependent on the mother,” it becomes problematic to distinguish a human individual (any stage of a fetus) from a human person (132). Like Pera, Ratzinger is welcoming uncertainty in this line of reasoning to support a pro-life doctrine. Faith, in part, relies on uncertainty.

According to Ratzinger, the right-to-life debate for legislators is not a matter of “ethics of faith, but rather of the ethics of reason.” Here, at a meeting point between the empirical and the philosophical level, the abortion debate has been solved by reason alone (132). The harmony between the ethics of faith and the ethics of reason that Ratzinger calls for in the Pera exchange is a re-purposing of the faith-reason position taken in the Habermas exchange, which is described as a mutual need between reason and faith and between reason and religion, whereby each helps purify the other.³⁹

Missing Pieces

In the Pera exchange, there are two questions that arise for which answers are not directly provided: first, should the spirit of the Church be Ratzinger’s main concern instead of European history, or are they as interwoven as he thinks? Related, can a *sense of the sacred*, in this case, European Christianity, transcend national or ethnic boundaries? Answering these questions involves laying out the Hellenistic roots of the Catholic faith, which he addresses in the *Regensburg Lecture*. There, he drills down

³⁹ Ratzinger, “That Which Holds the World Together: The Pre-Political Moral Foundations of a Free State,” in *Dialectics of Secularization*, 78.

further than the historical and biblical life of Christ to reveal Christianity's Hellenistic roots, bringing forward an ongoing struggle the Church has had with integrating localized cultures within Church doctrine without "de-Hellenizing" the faith. In this sense, it will be shown that the works in *Without Roots* serve as a primer for the next two events, Ratzinger's *Crisis of Cultures Address* and the *Regensburg Lecture*. The documents in *Without Roots* also connect *Dialectics of Secularization*, as Ratzinger's rationalism is put to application in a number of materialized situations.

The Enlightenment and modern era are both discussed throughout Ratzinger's documents in this exchange, and they serve as the starting point for unpacking the European cultural crisis he is so concerned about, leading to an underlying feeling that the Church should re-embrace and absorb both of these movements, or, at the very least, find a way to better to integrate parts of them so it can re-enter conversations in philosophy that left it behind.

Lastly, Ratzinger and Pera seek unity and are speaking about the common conditions that can unify the West. This event certainly targets relativism as an underlying cause of the West's demise, but they would be better served in looking at the value of the narrative model on MacIntyre's terms. It is natural to think of one's self in the "narrative mode" and find that story within a history and tradition whether or not one accepts or recognizes this cultural inheritance (AV, 206 and 221). The narrative model provides the binding obligations that Ratzinger is looking for, as indicated in the weaknesses of Pera's civil religion. The autonomous self is incapable of escaping these bounds, for they are part of the individual's social conditioning and surrounding

environments. A Hellenized model brings greater substance for what Ratzinger seeks as the Western world continues to move further away from its cultural origins.

Chapter 5: Modernity, Enlightenment, and Familiar Social Glue

Nonetheless, to think of a human life as a narrative unity is to think in a way alien to the dominant individualist and bureaucratic modes of modern culture.

– Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*

Introduction

Recapping the Events: Preparations for Countering Obsolescence

Before discussing the texts covered in this chapter—Ratzinger’s *Christianity and the Crisis of Cultures* address and the *Regensburg Lecture*—a quick recap of the primary sources analyzed so far should be presented. The Pera and Habermas events bring to light the problems pluralism and modernity’s rationalism pose to twenty-first-century European civilization and the Catholic Church. The Habermas event also offers a window into Ratzinger’s rationalism, which is largely consistent with Catholic theology’s understanding of the relationship between faith and reason: revelation is the starting point from which all philosophical inquiries begin, and these inquiries subsequently follow the same rational process that guides any line of sound reasoning. Ratzinger argues for the democratic guarantees of law and the need for limits on religious fundamentalism, with a suggestion that reason may act as more than simply a tool to guide philosophical inquiries—reason should serve as a check on religious fundamentalism, and it is here that we find the secure and forgiving nature of Ratzinger’s rationalism. In the Pera exchange, his concerns with pluralism are brought forth with regard to relativism, European identity, and the need for any community to have a strong cultural identity, which he defines as *a sense of the sacred*, the beliefs held most highly from generation to

generation that are bound up in historical and cultural developments. Identification with this deep sense of history becomes essential to both correcting the moral disorder of relativism and creating a sense of obligation to one's contemporaries and their legacies. With this need for a cultural identity established, the *Crisis of Cultures* address and the *Regensburg Lecture* provide an approach for securing this solidarity—the narrative method and a rekindling of Hellenized Christianity—and answer the question of which story could fulfill the *sense of a sacred* and serve as a communal narrative in the West. In the end, these two pieces install the European citizen into a constellation of Western touch-points that begin with ancient Greek civilization, continue into early Christianity, and struggle to survive in the Enlightenment—an era he believes is in need of great redefinition.

While the Ratzinger events are discussed in chronological order, this is not intended to suggest an arc of Ratzinger's political thought. Three reasons give pause to this suggestion. First, the sampling in this project does not span his entire career—this would amount to a separate research project and most likely find itself as a reference work endeavor. Second, there are core topics throughout the works presented here (faith's relationship with reason, modernism, the Enlightenment, pluralism) that are slightly more developed or insightful than the previous treatment of each event discussed in this project. Third, the ordering provides context for any esoteric reading that might be revealed in reading Ratzinger's thoughts on the Western cultural crisis, as we see mature writings prior to his papacy (Pera and Habermas exchanges), immediately before his elevation and while pondering career aspirations (*Crisis*), and following his rise to the papacy (*Regensburg*). There is a general continuity across these events that questions

certain aspects of modern liberalism. What is unique about the two events in this chapter is that Ratzinger is forced to confront how to reconcile the Church with both religious pluralism and the Enlightenment with the integration of the topics of inculturation and Hellenized Christianity. Leading up to these two events, Ratzinger leaves the impression that the Church is on the brink of obsolescence in the post-modern world because of a European identity that has lost sight of its cultural heritage. The three central themes of Ratzinger's political teaching—humility, obligation, and obsolescence—are present throughout all the events, but in *Crisis* and *Regensburg*, his solutions to obsolescence emerge. In the *Crisis* event, Ratzinger's re-interpretation of the Enlightenment as Christian in origin is one front on which Ratzinger counters the irrelevance of the Church and God in a world produced by the scientific revolution. If the Church cannot be understood in terms of perfection—this is also one of Ratzinger's charges against the Enlightenment's claims of universality—Ratzinger wants the Church to at least be understood as reasonable. This reasonableness of the Church and God is then extended in the *Regensburg* event, in which he discusses the nature and Greek origins of God, creating this system of Western touch-points that positions the Greek philosophic and cultural underpinnings of Europe as supplementary to biblical interpretation. Particular attention should be paid to his outline in *Regensburg* of the three stages of the de-Hellenization of the Christian faith, as it implies that an essential part of the Roman Catholic Church deteriorated as landmark eras and anthropological changes in the West birthed new ways to interpreting scripture.

Chapter Organization and Progression

This chapter first examines the arguments of Ratzinger's *Crisis of Cultures Address* and the *Regensburg Lecture* by taking a critical look at their key arguments while placing them within the dialogue of the communitarian critique. These events are then followed by two additional sections. "Recreational Pragmatism" seeks to explain why Ratzinger desires to absorb the foundations of the Enlightenment into Church theology, as well as his rhetorical technique for doing so. The last section of this chapter, "The Communitarian Connection," reflects on the effectiveness of both the *Regensburg* and *Crisis* events and Ratzinger's advocacy for more potent Hellenized features and influences of Christianity as a solution to Europe's cultural crisis, bringing the events into context with the preceding chapters and Ratzinger's communitarian thought at large.

Crisis of Cultures Address (April 1, 2005)

Reconciliation

Joseph Ratzinger delivered his *Crisis of Cultures* address⁴⁰ at the Convent of Saint Scholastica in Subiaco, Italy, on April 1, 2005, one day before the death of his predecessor, Pope John Paul II. The occasion was a ceremony for then Cardinal Ratzinger to receive the St. Benedict Award for the promotion of life and the family in Europe. This setting should be seen as the contextual background for the address since it is largely a critique of the Enlightenment, particularly the movement's status as the basis for modern European culture and the ensuing effects modern liberal individualism has

⁴⁰ The *Crisis of Cultures* reference addressed in this chapter is derived from the version published as the first chapter of *Christianity and the Crisis of Cultures* (2006).

had in hindering the Church's efforts to protect all stages of life. The address does touch on abortion and reproduction-related issues, but it also takes on the philosophical approaches that Ratzinger believes led to challenges in promoting life and curbing the human thirst for power. He believes that from the Enlightenment came modernity's tendency to inspire humans to dominate nature, and through this quest for domination, humans have created great inequalities since under such influence morality becomes an entirely subjective matter. As he puts it, the "possibilities available to humans for dominion over matter have grown in a manner we may truly call unimaginable." This new dominion includes terrorism, nuclear and biological weapons, and the self-manipulation and construction of humans. From a theistic point of view, all of this troubles Ratzinger because "man enters the world, no longer as a gift of the Creator, but as the product of our activity—and a product that can be selected according to requirements that we ourselves stipulated" (25–26). One could interpret Ratzinger's charge here as saying that humans are attempting to promote the species to a higher station or order in the world, and doing so without understanding the full implications of their actions. It is an example of unstrained will.

Human autonomy isn't confined to the realm of science. Ratzinger believes this attitude carries over into the political arena and contributes to great economic inequalities, the exploitation of the Earth, and famine (26–27). One could say the perpetrator of these inequities begins with modern liberal individualism as identified in the communitarian critique. Humans do what they can because their individual will allows them. That said, he must now account for how humans reached this point to see how this path can be corrected. The correction is partially defined in this address, namely,

reinterpreting the Enlightenment and Western Logos for the purposes of strengthening European identity and morality and re-establishing Christianity as a relevant player in serious philosophy; *Regensburg* then gives that narrative a fuller definition.

A Brief Detour: Defining Culture and Inculturation

Crisis was not the first time Ratzinger wrote on culture and inculturation. His 1993 lecture, *Christ, Faith, and the Challenge of Cultures*,⁴¹ given in Hong Kong to the presidents of the Asian Bishops' Conferences and the chairs of their doctrinal commissions, explored Christian universalism, the challenges of inculturation, and the dependent relationship between religion and culture. A quick summary of this address is necessary before discussing culture and Hellenized Christianity as stated in *Crisis*, as well as *Regensburg*, since it helps define culture and inculturation.

This older lecture broadly defines culture as “the historically developed common form of expression of the insights and values which characterize the life of a community” (1, 5). Within this package of insights and values, culture and religion are seen as inseparable, as religion plays a critical role in shaping a society's values since it is “the essential element of culture” (1, 10). Culture also contains a mutually beneficial communal element, since a strong culture helps the individual thrive: community is “the prerequisite for individual fulfillment” (1, 7). This Thomistic notion⁴² of man as a

⁴¹ Citations for this lecture refer to section first, paragraph second.

⁴² See Book I, chapter 1 in St. Thomas Aquinas's *On Kingship*. Specifically, he writes: “It is natural for man, more than for any other animal, to be a social and political animal, to live in a group” (paragraph 4). Further, he argues that man is not sufficient by himself “to procure the necessities of life were he to remain solitary” so a society “will be the

political animal dependent on the cooperation of others to flourish can be seen as an end goal of a society's purpose. True to this philosophic tradition in the Church, Ratzinger writes: "In order to be whole, everybody needs each other. Man approaches the unity and wholeness of his being only in the reciprocity of all great cultural achievements" (1, 22). In addition to self-preservation, Ratzinger asks the individual to wholeheartedly accept the notion that by committing himself to the group the individual transcends "himself in culture and finds himself carried along in a larger social subject whose insights he can borrow, continue and develop further" (1, 9).

Inculturation is the process by which a culture adopts a new religion and infuses its own distinct cultural insights and values into it. The faith then absorbs these customs and adapts without compromising its core. Ratzinger does express reservations with this process though, especially with regard to the Christian faith, since he sees an inseparable relationship between religion and the original culture from which it was generated. The religion a culture is derived from is vital to retaining the culture's essence, for as Ratzinger puts it: "If you remove from a culture its own religion which begets it, then you rob it of its heart" (1, 2). As for Christianity, he goes so far as to say that it would be "nonsensical to offer a sort of pre-cultural or de-cultured Christianity which would rob itself of its own historical force and degrade itself to an empty collection of ideas" (2, 19).

For inculturation to be a viable process, there must be a universal nature to the culture adopting the new religion. This process presumes two things: 1) human nature is the same across all cultures and 2) there is a human condition in all cultures to seek union

more perfect the more it is sufficient unto itself to procure the necessities of life" (paragraph 14).

(1, 3). Inculturation is most successful when no injustice is done to a culture after integrating the new religion, since all cultures possess a disposition toward the truth (1, 4). However, it is not clear how Ratzinger reconciles this when he also states that “there is no such thing as faith devoid of culture or culture devoid of faith” and only offers a solution that cultures must take a shape that allows for universality in order to successfully complete a process of inculturation, or, as he calls this, a “flourishing [of] new forms” (1, 18). This idea of an evolutionary form seems contradictory to the previous idea that every faith contains strong elements of its originating culture. The only way this works is if the adopter can absorb both the religion’s theological doctrines and its core cultural components.

While this address demonstrates how Ratzinger understands inculturation in his own terms, it is also important to bring in an outside definition of the concept in general. Gerald A. Arbuckle’s *Culture, Inculturation & Theologians* (2010) defines it in more reciprocal terms:

Inculturation is a dialectical interaction between Christian faith and cultures, in which these cultures are challenged, affirmed, and transformed toward the reign of God, and in which Christian faith is likewise challenged, affirmed, and enhanced by this experience. When interacting with members of his own complex culture and with people of other cultures Jesus Christ fosters this dialectical exchange characteristic of inculturation (152).

Arbuckle’s definition also makes Christ look more like a dialectical ambassadorial figure who carries out the inculturation process in which both the adopter and the Christian faith participate in a mutually beneficial relationship. What his definition shares with the definitions of others is that there is a universal nature of the Christian faith that allows it to transcend boundaries. Arbuckle also identifies several foundational truths of

inculturation, some of which emphasize this principle of universalism. This includes the ideas that “the holy spirit is the source of truth no matter where it is found,” and no single culture can be the sole expresser of the truths of faith since truth translates to all cultures (168–170).

A New Moralism, European Foundations, and Scientific Uniformity

The *Crisis* address calls for a public morality that goes beyond subjective standards, for Ratzinger believes the basis for current human behavior is a new moralism consisting of “justice, peace, and conservation of creation.” While these values may be of some utility, Ratzinger says that this new moralism is vague, “confined to the sphere of politics,” and no longer a “personal duty” in everyday life (27–28). One could call this the result of utilitarianism or the consequentialism that he was critical of earlier.

Ratzinger yearns for personal duty as an aspect of moralism, and this is key to the communitarian strain found in his work, as it is reminiscent of Taylor’s call for generational obligations to foster an environment in which human potential can be cultivated. The communal and civic nature of this work, and its connection to common moral reference points, makes his approach to community and obligation fit the communitarian designation not only in regard to Taylor but also in regard to MacIntyre’s commentary on common moral language.

What logically should follow, and does, in this address is discussion of a common ground and baseline for a moral code, namely, Christianity. Ratzinger sees Christianity as the cultural underpinning of Europe. While acknowledging that it is not European in

origin, he believes that Christianity took on its most distinct and developed form in Europe. He is disappointed that since the Renaissance era and the Enlightenment movement, Europe's cultural efficacy has been weakened through a scientific rationality that "imposes a uniformity on the world." Under this new paradigm, God then becomes less relevant since he cannot be proven with scientific criteria. Worse, he is relegated to the "sphere of subjective choices." There is a dual implication here. First, it is no longer reasonable or rational to treat God as relevant since his existence cannot be demonstrated through scientific verification. Second, the value of objective and universal standards is diminished. Ratzinger describes this doubt in the basic terms of good and evil and consequentialism (30–31). Without commitment to values and beliefs based on unscientific principles, including the belief in God, basic human rights, and divined codes of conduct, Europe is now in a cultural crisis since its identity was based on the unverifiable premises of Christianity.

Resuscitating God, Again

One way to bring God back into the public sphere begins with reinterpreting the Enlightenment, which eradicated God from political relevancy. But first, Ratzinger must clear the decks regarding religious pluralism and those who would oppose any mention of God in public life. There is an assumption that belief in the divine is part of the human condition, so what Ratzinger first proposes is a soft, equivocal insertion of God. Echoing some of Marcello Pera's doubts regarding religious sensitivities in pluralistic societies, he questions the proclamation that mentioning the Christian roots of Europe in the European

Constitution would offend non-Christians who live on the continent since he calls it a “historical fact” that Europe’s history is a Christian one (32–33). The tone here in *Crisis* is slightly more assertive than that of the Pera exchange and resembles Pera’s thoughts on the West’s self-censorship and self-repression in the face of pluralism. One could even say the idea of establishing a role for Christianity in the European Constitution represents an intensity of preference shift by Ratzinger to take on Pera’s ambitious project of a non-denominational civil religion; however, this is cut short later in the address when he proposes that Christianity in its purest form must contain and preserve its Greek influence. This influence includes the idea that Christianity is the religion of Logos and the etymological argument that to truly understand the Bible one must look at its original Greek terms—this is not laid out in *Crisis* but later in *Regensburg*, which is why these events have been tied together in this chapter as supplements to one another. A Greek understanding of God helps to introduce an equivocal insertion of God into public life with a non-secular endorsement. This equivocal act looks like a slight deviation from his earlier encounter with Pera in which he takes issue with the idea of a legislated non-denominational state-run religion, though one could argue that it is more in line with the *sense of the sacred* concept since the idea of God—in this case one defined through its Greek origins—would connect many religions. In the *Regensburg Lecture*, he makes clear which version of Christianity is most palatable for Europe and for preserving what he believes to be original biblical teachings. Before pushing this idea, however, he must make an attempt to remove doubt that the other two partners in the big three religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) would accept this. In Pera-like fashion, he asks: Who would be offended by recognizing Europe’s Christian past? He doubts that religious

pluralism is the culprit for God's absence: "It is not the mention of God that offends those who belong to other religions; rather, it is the attempt to construct the human community in a manner that absolutely excludes God." He also argues Muslims are more offended by "the cynicism of a secularized culture that denies its own foundations," while Jews share the same roots as Christianity, which go back to Mount Sinai, where God's voice was heard (33).

The closing of *Crisis* returns to the Pera exchange's discussion of God's place in the European Constitution. Ratzinger argues that God's absence from this document is not a matter of tolerance to accommodate non-believers, but rather "an expression of a consciousness that would like to see God eradicated once and for all from the public life of humanity and shut up in the subjective sphere of cultural residues from the past." The responsible party here again is evolutionary relativism and its purported "possession of the definitive knowledge of human reason, with the right to consider everything else merely as a stage in human history that is basically obsolete and deserves to be relativized" (44–45). Ratzinger's critique of relativism is central to sustaining cultural roots, for it does not view religion as a commodity that can succumb to obsolescence. That said, one must believe that Ratzinger is stating that Europe's cultural reference point is Christianity. Other cultures may have different points of reference in their history, but for Europe, this is the communal narrative that should be preserved. If Christianity cannot be immediately reinstalled as this narrative, Ratzinger looks to insert it as part of the Enlightenment, which he believes has filled this role for several centuries now.

The Enlightenment: Criticism and a Reinterpretation

To bring God back into everyday European life, Ratzinger begins by unraveling the Enlightenment—the movement that exiled God from the public sphere—as part of an effort to rebrand the perception of the movement. This is an attempt to make the Church relevant to a discussion that left God absent from much of public discourse and the latest paradigm transformation to post-modern philosophy. In Thomas Kuhn’s own description of paradigm shifts, he argued that those who hold onto the views of the past “are simply read out of the profession, which thereafter ignores their work” (1996, 19). Ratzinger’s rebranding of the Enlightenment as Christian in origin is one way to avoid having the Church perceived as a historical anchor. It also is a hope that such a rebranding will help the Church become a part of philosophic conversations again; hence, Ratzinger’s engagement in the previously discussed encounters with Habermas and Pera.

Discussion of the Enlightenment is a part of the communitarian critique’s reaction to the liberal individualism of Rawls and Nozick, particularly the influence of Kant. Immanuel Kant’s essay, “What Is Enlightenment?” argues that enlightenment is man’s emancipation from self-incurred tutelage, which is the inability “to make use of his understanding without direction from another” (85). Kant was forging a democratized reason that saw individuals as fully capable of making their own decisions based on reason and observation without the influence of faith in revelation or other unobservable phenomena. His *Critique of Pure Reason* similarly stresses the necessity of empirical observation as the basis for then guiding one’s thoughts. Whether this is still a viable approach to political philosophy has come under fire from all corners of the field, not just the communitarian critique. Much criticism of modern liberal individualism comes from

the idea that it collapses in on itself. Criticism from those advocating communitarian theory focuses on the need to balance the individual with the group and emphasizes the value of common narratives. At the fringe of Enlightenment criticism are scholars such as Richard Rorty who question the relevancy of the Enlightenment in favor of poetics and language building over scientizing philosophy:

It was natural for liberal political thought in the eighteenth century to try to associate itself with the most promising cultural development of the time, the natural sciences. But, unfortunately, the Enlightenment wove much of its political rhetoric around a picture of the scientist as a sort of priest, someone who achieved contact with nonhuman truth by being “logical,” “methodological,” and “objective.” This was a useful tactic in its day, but it is less useful nowadays (1989, 52).

John Gray, who sides a great deal with MacIntyre, views the era as bringing about a calculating and willful nature that is “destructively purposeless” and “a self-defeating project, in both intellectual and political terms” (1995, 146 and 151). Gray wonders whether the door to the Enlightenment has been closed, since the cultural effects are irreversible—this is the question Ratzinger is up against.

Rather than re-enter this body of criticism—the Church has a demonstrated history of attacking liberal individualism—Ratzinger now attempts to reinterpret the Enlightenment. Reinterpretation is certainly not a defense, but instead is an acknowledgment of the era’s flaws. Ratzinger’s new outlook on this era is achieved by first identifying its notable outputs; second, by pointing out its weaknesses; and third, by attaching Christianity to the Enlightenment as both a pseudonym for Greek Logos and a gap filler where pure reason fails.

Ratzinger’s understanding of the Enlightenment hinges on the idea that liberty is the fundamental value and principle driver for a number of rights generated from the

movement, including the freedom of religion and the expression of one's own opinions, a democratic state, political parties, independent administrators of law, and what could be described as certain inalienable rights of men (34). This is not to say that Ratzinger would deny any of these rights, but he questions at what point they either went too far or contributed to an extremely self-centered attitude.

Crisis contains three general criticisms of the Enlightenment that emerge in Ratzinger's address: the movement created a self-defeating philosophic enterprise, it proved to be insufficient in its claims of universality, and it detached man from moral obligations through its limitless liberty. The first two claims are best summed up in the following passage and strongly resemble claims from the communitarian critique:

Since it is the culture of reason that has finally achieved complete self-awareness, it naturally boasts of its claimed universality and imagines that it is complete in itself, without needing any other cultural factors to complement it (36).

The third reason also has a communitarian link since detachment from moral obligation, as demonstrated by Taylor, is the first step in forgoing larger communal responsibilities. This detachment is also bound up in the insufficiency and self-defeating nature of the Enlightenment. Without God—or a *sense of the sacred*—obligation is an optional activity. Further, the philosophic approach that weighs liberty first leads to contradictions and suppresses motivation to pursue this *sense of the sacred* since a collection of values is purely subjective and unscientific.

Ratzinger sees another way the Enlightenment unravels itself: liberty provides a cultural foundation that desires the best of two contradictory worlds—the emancipation of limits to produce pure liberty and a guarantee that one's own rights won't be infringed upon (35–36). In the end, liberty folds in on itself. As Ratzinger puts it: “As we have

seen, even the concept of liberty, which initially seemed capable of expanding without any limits, leads in the end to the self-destruction of liberty itself” (40–41).

The Enlightenment will always be insufficient for Ratzinger when considering the limitations he put forth on faith and reason in the Habermas exchange. Here in *Crisis*, he describes the movement as one that believes in its own completeness and self-sufficiency, thus dooming itself in the eyes of Ratzinger. He sees an inherent contradiction in this belief, for while the Enlightenment is a “culture of reason” that believes itself to be completely self-aware and in possession of a universality that renders cultural factors irrelevant (36), it proliferated a world of relativism.

At first glance, Ratzinger’s attack on the universal nature of the Enlightenment is a peculiar criticism since he often boasts of the Church’s universality. One could argue that one strength of the Enlightenment is that it lacked any cultural factors to hold it back, making it easier to plug it into any society as its guiding force. This is certainly consistent with the new culture that Ratzinger believes was forged in Europe through the Enlightenment, a culture in which “God has nothing whatever to do with public life and with the foundations of the state” (37). However, Ratzinger wonders how any culture, or a movement as robust as the Enlightenment, can have roots outside of itself. Surely, it must have evolved from something, and this is the opening Ratzinger sees to re-attach Greek roots to the Enlightenment. This also exposes the inherent collapsible nature of Enlightenment philosophy. With an incomplete cultural component, Ratzinger says the Enlightenment “consciously cuts off its own historical roots, depriving itself of the powerful sources from which it sprung” (41). For Europe, these roots are Greek in origin,

particularly the acceptance of God's existence and the redefinition of him and Christianity as Logos itself.

Ratzinger's Solution: A New Social Glue—Christianity as Logos

The most unique offering from *Crisis* that separates it from the previous two events discussed in this project is the social glue proposed by Ratzinger—this is the hope that Christianity can be viewed as the religion of Logos and, in doing so, redefine Europe's current cultural space shaper, the Enlightenment. If the primary driver for the world around Ratzinger is the rationalism of the Enlightenment, then this as an opportunity to inject a new component into that driver. In the end, he positions Christianity, God, and Logos as one in the same, representing a new, multifaceted communal narrative for Europe.

Ratzinger is clear to assert that his critique of the Enlightenment's rationalism is not a rejection of the Enlightenment and modernity altogether. Instead, he believes that “[f]rom the very beginning, Christianity has understood itself to be the religion of the *Logos*, to be a religion in keeping with reason” (47). This phrasing, as well as the derivative forms used therein, is repeated several times, marking it as the most critical message Ratzinger disseminates in the address. True to his previous writings on faith and reason, he states that the Christian faith “proceeds from the *Logos*, from creative reason, and is therefore open to all that is truly rational” (50). There is a loose association here with connecting the logic of the Church, which accepts revelation as its starting point, with the same logical process of reason derived from the Enlightenment, despite the era's

rejection of unobservable phenomena such as God or revelation as a legitimate starting point.

Ratzinger believes that reason lost its voice in the Christian tradition when the Enlightenment segregated reason from religion. This is a reasonable assessment—the Enlightenment did elevate reason to philosophy’s central authority—but he questions how this meshes with “a religion of the persecuted” who knew the “principle of liberty of faith” as well as anyone when it came to understating the dangers of a state religion. In this sense, he sees the Enlightenment values of freedom of religion and the human reasoning that leads to this understanding as Christian in their origin (47–48).

The connection Ratzinger is working to establish is far from new frontier for the Church; as he notes, the Second Vatican Council’s Constitution on the Church in the Modern World also attempted to reconcile the Church with modernity by demonstrating a harmony between Christianity and the Enlightenment (48–49). Ratzinger is reminding his audience of the faithful that what has largely been viewed as an antagonistic relationship does not have to be so. To appeal to those outside of the faithful, he draws on Kant as a representative of the latter portion of the Enlightenment, as well as tactics of pragmatic persuasion. Ratzinger interprets Kant as offering a solution for connecting practical reason with God. While Kant denied that God could be known through pure reason, he doubted that man would act in a moral manner without accepting the concepts of God, freedom, and immortality that are derived through practical reason (51).

Whether individuals are faithful or not, Ratzinger wants them to at least recognize the utility God plays in a society for influencing its citizens to act in a peaceful and moral

manner. If one insists they must be guided by reason alone, one should by way of practical concern see the precautionary value of accepting the illusion of God:

Even the one who does not succeed in finding the path to accepting the existence of God ought nevertheless to try to live and to direct his life *veluti si Deus daretur*, as if God did indeed exist. This is the advice Pascal gave to his non-believing friends, and it is the advice that I should like to give to our friends today who do not believe (51–52).

There is a surface-level inconsistency in the above passage, when compared to his position against a non-denominational civil religion in the Pera exchange. Ratzinger is asking non-believers to set aside a strong belief of theirs to make way for the possibility of faith; this underplays the importance this value holds for them (agnostics and atheists). He was critical of this very idea in his earlier exchange with Pera and the idea of a non-denominational Christian civil religion. However, this seeming inconsistency makes sense when thought of in terms of the broader *sense of the sacred* advocated in the Pera exchange. One could also argue that Ratzinger is making a case for religion based on its utility of human expression, similar to previous claims made by Habermas.⁴³ From a pragmatic perspective, it again seems that Ratzinger is hoping to capitalize on practical grounds, warning that “the total exclusion of God leads us more and more to the brink of the abyss, toward the utter annihilation of man” (51). Therefore, a substantial subset of the faithful is necessary in the populace for solidifying Ratzinger’s social glue. Without using the phrase *a sense of the sacred*, he is calling on the same concept for God’s presence to sincerely coalesce in the public and private spheres in the following passage:

We need men who keep their eyes fixed on God, learning from him what true humanity means. We need men whose intellect is enlightened by the light of God, men whose hearts are opened by God, so that their intellect can speak to the

⁴³ See Chapter Three’s subsection titled “Context of the Encounter,” on p. 63.

intellect of others and their hearts can open the hearts of others. It is only by means of we who have been touched by God that God can return to be with mankind (52).

The private realm here is understood to be individual pursuits in knowing God. The public part is achieved by reaching out to others by either sharing what has been learned or by living example. The above quote is also quite important because while *Crisis* does contain some elements of pragmatism, this passage deafens this interpretive approach of Ratzinger in this piece, as it is clear he desires a genuine presence of God in society.

Regensburg Lecture (September 12, 2006): "Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections"

Hellenized Christianity

"Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections,"⁴⁴ also referred to as the *Regensburg Lecture*, picks up *Crisis's* proposition that Christianity is the religion of Logos and adds to this idea etymological details on how Greek Logos found its way into the Bible, which Ratzinger sees as part of a larger Hellenistic influence that has diminished but should be revitalized. In other words, in its proper and original form, Christianity must preserve its ancient Greek roots. This is not the explicit intention of the lecture, but it is certainly the largest implication that can be drawn from it. The attachment of cultural origins to the Bible is intended to create stronger reference points

⁴⁴ The source of Ratzinger's *Regensburg Lecture* was obtained on May 14, 2010, from the Vatican's Web site at www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg_en.html References are identified by paragraph.

for moral language. Scripture cannot simply be interpreted as one chooses; rather, one must supplement one's reading with both anthropological and etymological investigations. Doing so will repair—to borrow from MacIntyre—the broken moral language that has led to the cultural, moral, and identity crises about which Ratzinger is so concerned.

Hellenized Christianity—the original Greek text contained in the Bible and supplementary philosophic works—becomes a narrative itself and the reference point of societal values for the West. An additional take-away from the *Regensburg Lecture* is that it begins to look like objective standards are not enough, hence, the need for a communitarian system that places objective ideas within a societal context. This is certainly not an intention of Ratzinger's, but rather a byproduct of his writing if he's endorsing Hellenized Christianity. Christianity needs to remain Hellenized to make sense, but Ratzinger's connections between Catholicism and ancient Greek philosophy are loose and tangential at best. However, he is on to something. One wishes that he had said something more direct about Greek influence on Christian theology by way of philosophic examples rather than relying on the idea that culture—bringing with it the thoughts of its people—and religion can mix and become infused. This discussion could have included, but not limited itself to: the concept of the Christ-like selfless, beautiful actions promoted in the *Nicomachean Ethics* or even the general influence of Aristotle on Thomas and, similarly, Plato on Augustine. There are a couple of references to Socrates in the lecture, though only in reference to his attempt to transcend myth and something he once said to Phaedo regarding false philosophical opinions. It is possible Ratzinger intentionally refrained from discussing specific Greek ideas and thinkers, given the

lecture's primary audience of Catholic academia, but it is nonetheless an omission worth noting if one is talking about Greek culture and its notable legacies.

In reading this lecture, one must eventually ask: If Christianity is to be objective and universally valid, why can't the Greek influence be subtracted if Christianity can hold up in any culture? Based on this chapter's earlier section⁴⁵ on culture and inculturation, Ratzinger's likely answer would be that it is difficult to separate the influence of a culture that initially generates a religion since there is something intrinsic to the religion that makes bracketing its cultural influence a difficult task without great compromise to the religion. Also, in the Pera exchange he acknowledged that Christianity had experienced its own Greco-Latin inculturation. With the Roman Catholic Church, Ratzinger sees something special about the Greek origins in both Christianity's original writing of the New Testament in Greek and translation of the Old Testament from Hebrew (mostly) to Greek. Without proper care and attention to the Greek words used to construct and reconstruct the Bible, the original message is lost. Ratzinger does not mention the generational aspect of interpretive flaw—the idea that there may be cultural definitions lost over time—but considering how many centuries have passed since the scriptures were written this is an additional reason to bolster his argument. Not only has the original intent been obscured, but, according to Ratzinger, the Enlightenment and modernity have subtracted this unique element from Christianity at large. Ratzinger sees this as the new, humanized Jesus, which he includes in the three stages that de-Hellenized the Christian faith. *Regensburg* calls on the university system to rethink how it approaches modernity in order to allow the Greek imprints to resurface.

⁴⁵ See the subsection titled “A Brief Detour: Defining Culture and Inculturation” on p. 148.

Like the *Crisis* address, Ratzinger's understanding of modern theory comes to light as well as his desire to repackage modernism in the university, which is why the lecture begins with reflections on his teaching experiences within the university system. Since modernism laid the groundwork to usher in contemporary thought and European life, redefining this era and its outputs offers an opportunity to reposition the Church in the new world in which Ratzinger finds himself. The connection between the *Crisis* and *Regensburg* events can also be seen as follows: If one acknowledges the public necessity of a deity, the question then becomes which God? In the Pera exchange, Ratzinger critiqued Pera's proposition of ambiguous deities and religions. *Crisis* partially fills this gap by suggesting a constitutional or public decree that takes into account God, while *Regensburg* then details how God is understood in the West. In the end, what emerges is a constellation of touch-points for a communal narrative and social glue in the Christian West.

Principally, the lecture has three goals: 1) to show that acting violently is irrational and goes against the nature of God (Logos); 2) to highlight essential elements of Christianity that are of Greek origin that demonstrate the unreasonableness of violence; and 3) to demonstrate that God, Logos, and reason are one and the same. Making God an all-knowing, logical entity reveals the imperfect nature of humans since they must struggle and make choices in a condition void of complete knowledge.

Violence as Irrational Behavior

The *Regensburg Lecture* cannot be discussed without touching on a widely controversial remark made in the speech regarding Islam and violence. It is only somewhat related to Ratzinger's social glue, though mostly because it positions God as a rational actor and reasonable entity whose rational nature is based on the idea of Logos. Using the story of fourteenth-century Byzantine emperor Manuel II and his dialogue with an educated Persian, Ratzinger hopes to demonstrate that violence is an irrational act because it goes against the nature of God. The interlocutors' discussion on the subject of Christianity, Islam, and the unreasonableness of violence serves as a parable for the broader vision of the essay, namely, the idea that God and Logos are the same.

An analysis of this lecture, including the parable, is included in this research project, not due to the controversy it caused by offending the Muslim world, but because the parable was part of an attempt in the larger message of the lecture to define the nature and origins of God. Yet the misused parable actually detracts from this purpose and the magnitude of the lecture. While much attention was paid to the parable and what it meant for Muslim-Christian relations, this is not where the greater focus should be since the parable does not represent a significant portion of the lecture. This chapter's analysis of the lecture will show greater dimension to this work than simply the parable. One reason for this is that one may wonder if the genuineness of the controversial remark should be de-emphasized since Ratzinger did apologize for the controversy caused by his misuse of the quote. The Vatican's secretary of state, Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, sent the apology on behalf of Ratzinger, reiterating that the pope is unequivocally in favor of inter-religious and intercultural dialogue, which Ratzinger had stated the previous year in a

meeting with representatives of Muslim communities in Cologne, Germany. Bertone goes out of his way to clarify Ratzinger's true intentions as he writes: "The Holy Father thus sincerely regrets that certain passages of his address could have sounded offensive to the sensitivities of the Muslim faithful, and should have been interpreted in a manner that in no way corresponds to his intentions."⁴⁶

The apology also restated the Church's official position on non-Christian religions, particularly Islam, as formulated in Vatican II's *Nostra Aetate*, which declared that the Church regards Muslims "with esteem" for their recognition of one God, reverence of Jesus as a prophet, honor for Mary, belief in a day of judgment, and the Muslim way of life that worships God "through prayer, almsgiving, and fasting."⁴⁷ It should also be noted that *Nostra Aetate* called for an end to hostilities between Christians and Muslims.⁴⁸

The misappropriated quotation is also likely the result of an early papal decision of Ratzinger's to forgo retaining a Vatican adviser on relations with non-Christian religions. When elevated to pontiff, Ratzinger removed Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald from his post heading the Vatican department that dealt with relations to non-Christian religions under John Paul II. Fitzgerald, a British-born cleric, was redeployed as a papal nuncio (ambassador) to Egypt and delegate to the Arab League. One could speculate that this reassignment meant the absence of a much-needed expert on Islam from the pope's

⁴⁶ Bertone, "Statement by Card. Tarcisio Bertone," paragraph 5.

⁴⁷ Bertone, "Statement by Card. Tarcisio Bertone," paragraph 2. Bertone cites no. 3 from *Nostra Aetate*.

⁴⁸ See *Nostra Aetate* (section 3, paragraph 2), where Pope Paul VI writes: "Since in the course of centuries not a few quarrels and hostilities have arisen between Christians and Moslems, this sacred synod urges all to forget the past and to work sincerely for mutual understanding and to preserve as well as to promote together for the benefit of all mankind social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom."

circle who would have likely caught the misused quote and parable found in the lecture. All of this being said, the remark regarding Islam and violence does need to be examined because it relates to the nature of God and logic.

Using an edition of *Manuel II Paléologue, Entretiens avec un Musulman* by Prof. Theodore Khoury, Ratzinger examines the exchange between two interlocutors (the fourteenth-century Byzantine emperor Manuel II and an educated Persian) on the concept of holy war. It is important to note the reference to Khoury's version because at times it is difficult to distinguish between Ratzinger's voice and that of the characters, and even that of the text's editor. This confusion likely contributed to what Ratzinger was trying to say in *Regensburg* when he states that "[t]he emperor must have known that surah 2,256 reads: 'There is no compulsion in religion.'" The point here is that the emperor should have known that religion does not will itself onto others. Yet, in addressing the relationship between religion and violence, the emperor states: "Show me just what Mohammed brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached." Ratzinger explains the emperor's position, that faith through violence is unreasonable because "[v]iolence is incompatible with the nature of God and the nature of the soul" (no. 3). If God is to be viewed as the equivalent of Logos, then violent conversion is contrary to God's nature since it does not act in accordance with reason. Yet Ratzinger's use of the citation is ultimately unclear. Is he attacking the position that religion in general invokes violence, or is he implying there is something inherent in Islam that leads to this? Unfortunately, the lecture does not contain the Church's position on the Muslim world that is articulated in Vatican II's *Nostra Aetate*.

Another part of the lecture uses Khoury's voice to explain that the rationality of God also comes at the expense of the Islamic tradition, as Ratzinger writes:

The editor, Theodore Khoury, observes: "For the emperor, as a Byzantine shaped by Greek philosophy, this statement is self-evident. But for Muslim teaching, God is absolutely transcendent. His will is not bound up with any of our categories, even that of rationality" (no. 4).

The implication here is that the God discussed is a Western one, specifically, a rational Greek one. *Regensburg* argues that God cannot be both rational and violent, for it is no coincidence that if one studies the original Greek words for God and Logos, one will find that in the original Christian tradition God was to be understood as a rational actor, which is where Ratzinger's essay goes next. When God is typically spoken of in terms of Logos it is in terms of intelligent design or a natural ordering to God's doing whereby the world is not simply arbitrary. We now have a discussion of God bound to a cultural and philosophic understanding. This is the particularist approach of Ratzinger's argument that must be explained.

God = Logos = Reason [or God as Reason/Logos]

Ratzinger sees God, Logos, and reason as one in the same. Citing the book of Genesis, Ratzinger reminds his audience that in:

the first verse of the whole Bible, John began the prologue of his Gospel with the words: "In the beginning was the λόγος" ... God acts, *συν λόγῳ*, with Logos. Logos means both reason and word—a reason which is creative and capable of self-communication, precisely as reason (no. 5).

There appears to be an odd connection here—is God Hellenized simply because of the usage of a word with Greek origins? Does this mean that the ancient Greeks had an

exclusive license to logic? Or, is this the Greco-Latin influence Ratzinger talked about in the Pera exchange? First, describing God in terms of Logos distinguishes God's capabilities from those of humans, who are generally intellectually limited on their own, and it is important to remember that throughout the four Ratzinger events discussed in this project, he has been critical of human efforts to master nature. Second, and this is where much of the lecture is directed, Ratzinger is creating an etymological pairing of the Bible with its Greek origins. Ratzinger offers a myriad of examples of Greek influence on Christianity and the Bible, including the visions and theology of St. Paul, practical cultural integration in Hellenistic territories in the early days of Christianity, and the Greek translations of the Hebrew Old Testament.

The first part of Ratzinger's St. Paul connection draws on Paul's vision, in which the roads to Asia were barred and a Macedonian man pleads to him for help, which Ratzinger sees as an "intrinsic necessity of a rapprochement between Biblical faith and Greek inquiry" (no. 5). The second connection he makes with St. Paul is when he finds that Paul saw love as an act that transcends knowledge and brings one closer to God, who is Logos. Through human reason and the love of God, "Christian worship is, again to quote Paul—'λογικη λατρεία,'—worship in harmony with the eternal Word and with our reason" (no. 7).⁴⁹

Ratzinger's etymological argument has broader impact when describing the wholesale translation of the Old Testament from Hebrew into Greek. In doing so, Ratzinger says that while the text became simpler, it also gave birth to the spread of the Christian faith. This is an acknowledgment of Christianity's Greek inculturation. He also

⁴⁹ Ratzinger attributes the passages from Paul to Ephesians 3:19 and Romans 12:1.

argues that political history shows a permeation of Hellenistic culture into early Christianity, as this was forcefully done by Hellenistic rulers who accommodated both Greek customs and thought as well as Christianity. Ratzinger calls this a “mutual enrichment.” This fused two traditions, resulting in a new wisdom (no. 6). This history of infusion explains what one will find when searching for *a sacred*, as posited in the Pera exchange. At this point, one must go beyond the language of the ancient Greeks and look at the body of philosophy that shaped the culture of ancient Greece, and later, Roman Catholicism.

The final part of Ratzinger’s etymological inquiry leads back to the lecture’s parable on the incompatibility of violence and religion. With the Christian faith joined with Greek thought, Ratzinger says that Manuel II could proclaim that not acting with Logos—loosely viewed as reason and love—was contrary to God’s nature (no. 6). This works if a Christian accepts the Greek translation of the Bible, but Ratzinger is also suggesting that it holds for Muslims since this is a reference back to the parable. This point was surely missed, considering the backlash the lecture received from the Muslim world. Nevertheless, the importance of Greek influence, if one believes it had a significant impact on the West, or at least the Church’s interpretation of the Bible, is that it laid the groundwork for a unique Western tradition. Ratzinger believes this tradition is the combination of biblical faith, Greek philosophical inquiry, and the addition of the Roman heritage that followed. This convergence created Europe (no. 8). However, Ratzinger now believes this heritage has gradually eroded since the sixteenth century, and he hopes that if this erosion is explored, a rescue will be within reach. The importance of this contextual history resembles the communitarian criticism leveled at Rawls,

specifically the ability to reason in the original position free from attachments to community, history (cultural and linguistic), and identity.

Three Stages of De-Hellenization

Ratzinger posits the de-Hellenization of the Christian faith has taken place in three distinct stages: 1) the Reformation of the sixteenth century; 2) the liberal theology of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; and 3) the cultural pluralism and simple gospel message of contemporary times. As Ratzinger describes each of these three stages, they seem to water down the divine aspects of Christianity, and with that the possibility of knowledge of the whole.

The Reformers of the first stage sought to free Christianity from its role as an “element of an overarching philosophical system” and return the Gospel to a “living historical Word” (no. 10). The implications of this stage are straightforward: philosophy’s influence or its process and methods are no longer relevant to understanding scripture, and the individual becomes empowered to interpret scripture free from external references. Simply put, it democratized biblical interpretation. The second stage of de-Hellenization—the liberal theology of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—is represented by Adolf von Harnack, who brought forth the idea to reposition Jesus as a man with a simple “humanitarian moral message,” which aligned his teachings with modern reason and distanced them from philosophy and theology. This also made Jesus historical and more able to be received by the scientific and academic paradigms (no. 11). One might see this as a well-intentioned way to make Christ relevant at a point in time

when the world was becoming scientized, but it is clear Ratzinger views it as another wave of transforming the Christian faith into something less objective or universal. He warns that if theology is seen as a scientific process, this excludes the question of God and relegates ethical questions to the realm of the subjective. This has profound implications for communities, for as ethics and religion become completely personal or conditional matters:

The subject then decides, on the basis of his experiences, what he considers tenable in matters of religion, and the subjective “conscience” becomes the sole arbiter of what is ethical. In this way, though, ethics and religion lose their power to create a community and become a completely personal matter. This is a dangerous state of affairs for humanity, as we see from the disturbing pathologies of religion and reason which necessarily erupt when reason is so reduced that questions of religion and ethics no longer concern it (no.13).

This is a striking passage when one considers what this means for communities. The implication here sounds much like the concerns of the communitarian critique in that as each person decides ethical questions as a personal matter there are no longer compelling civic obligations. The act of tying communities through common language and narratives seems even more futile, for individuals begin to live in a reality fashioned for their respective selves.

The third stage of de-Hellenization Ratzinger charges came from the rise of contemporary cultural pluralism and its ensuing call for a return to the simple gospel message of the New Testament. The simple gospel message theory in the third stage sounds quite similar to the first stage’s extraction of philosophy. The third stage is part of an effort to make room for inculturation in the highly pluralistic world of the twenty-first century. The irony that develops from this stage that Ratzinger must confront is the contention that the Church experienced its own form of Hellenized inculturation in its

early years—the idea that Greek thought was imposed on the New Testament. Ratzinger acknowledges that the New Testament “bears the imprint of the Greek spirit,” and concedes there are parts that aren’t essential for carrying over when Christianity is introduced to cultures for the first time. What he does maintain is faith’s relationship with reason: the use of human reason is part of faith itself (no. 14). This passage sends the message that even if the earlier St. Paul reference (i.e., love is an act that transcends knowledge and brings one closer to God, who is Logos) leaves a trace of this idea in the Bible that more is needed, especially as generations pass and cultural variances pose great barriers to entry into the original intent of the authors.

Reconnecting with Modernity

The Enlightenment and modernity make an appearance in the *Regensburg Lecture* when Ratzinger associates them with the university and Greek philosophy. One example of this loose association is seen as he aims to connect modernism to Hellenistic roots. He calls modern reason “a synthesis between Platonism (Cartesianism) and empiricism.” In this synthesis, the mathematical structure of matter is the Platonic element in the modern understanding of nature, and the decisive certainty gained through verification or falsification is the empirical application in experiment (no. 11). *Regensburg* also praises the accomplishments of these two eras:

[C]ritique of modern reason from within has nothing to do with putting the clock back to the time before the Enlightenment and rejecting the insights of the modern age. The positive aspects of modernity are to be acknowledged unreservedly: we are all grateful for the marvelous possibilities that it has opened up for mankind and for the progress in humanity that has been granted to us (no. 15).

Ernest L. Fortin offers a similar approach to harmonizing Christianity with the Enlightenment, stating there is little purpose in either an “uncritical rejection” or “uncritical acceptance” of the Enlightenment. Rather, it may be more fruitful to reformulate Christian doctrine in a way “that is both true to its native inspiration and appropriate to the needs of our age.” Fortin likens this integration to the way Aristotle was examined by the theologians of the Middle Ages. Agreeing with something John Paul II said, he says that “it would be futile to seek to live in a ‘pre-Constantian,’ or ‘pre-Kantian,’ or ‘pre-Einsteinian’ world.” When it comes to the Church’s anti-technology stance and caution with emerging scientific developments, Fortin offers a recommendation on how to balance the Church with the modern and post-modern worlds that tempers what Ratzinger is saying in *Regensburg*: “Ours [the Church] is a living tradition that must not only be maintained in its purity but constantly revitalized through its interaction with the best insights of modern science and scholarship” (1997, 133). The act of revitalization can be thought of in the *Regensburg Lecture* as Ratzinger’s call for reason and faith to come together in a new way in which reason can overcome its limitation of empirical falsification (no. 15). This will connect theology with the hard sciences in a visible way and bring back knowledge of the whole to the university system.

Another reason why the university needs to find a new way to integrate faith and God into its curriculum is the challenge that the universal reasoning of the Enlightenment poses for global pluralism. Here, there is an echo from the *Crisis* address’s message that the West is not living up to end of the dialogue in multiculturalism. Ratzinger writes: “A reason which is deaf to the divine and which relegates religion into the realm of

subcultures is incapable of entering into the dialogue of cultures” (no. 16). The difference between the two pieces is that *Regensburg* points to the university as part of the problem.

Recreational Pragmatism?

If Europe has indeed lost a connection to a salient identity and an ability to communicate—an issue prominently addressed in the Pera exchange—Ratzinger needs to create or revitalize a social glue for Europe, particularly its Christian population. Like authors in the communitarian critique, the narrative technique emerges, and in this case it is one that preserves the Church’s Hellenized roots. There are times during these speeches that Ratzinger can appear to be a pragmatist, possibly even a relativist, but this is short-lived as he is better understood as a particularist who accepts revelation as his first principle to construct a society’s group identity and reinforce social solidarity.

Ratzinger can count himself among those easily able to find faults with the Enlightenment and its legacy. An earlier lecture of his from 2001, “Common Identity and Common Will: Chances and Dangers for Europe,” contends the Enlightenment influenced the elimination of revelation and created an autonomous reason that transformed the biblical concept of “God the Creator and Sustainer” into “merely the initiator who ‘kicked off’ the universe” (2001, 156). In the modern era, reason was replaced by an evolutionary outlook on the world in which the concepts of absolute good and bad are problematic to define, yet man sought to “bring forth the rational world from the irrational raw material of reality.” It was then up to man to master nature and bring rationality to an otherwise chaotic world in order to limit suffering and maximize

pleasure, and, consequently, this becomes the end goal for society. Ratzinger likens this to the “Aldous Huxley vision” of the world (2001, 156–157). This is likely a reference to the soma-induced world of Huxley’s *Brave New World* in which pleasure is maximized at every turn through chemical manipulations of human perceptions and emotions, and religion is relocated and relegated to a terrarium-like outpost. Similar anti-Enlightenment sentiments are, of course, presented in the Habermas event already discussed in chapter 3. The era resurfaces in this chapter since a more balanced approach to viewing the era is presented. In his *Salt of the Earth* interview with Peter Seewald, he acknowledges that the model of the separation of Church and state as it appears in the Enlightenment had positive effects for the Church since it allowed for a free Church in a free state. However, while this reserved a space for the Church, he states: “What is negative about it is that modernity at the same time reduces religion to subjectivity” (1996b, 240).

In the communitarian critique, MacIntyre and Taylor charge the Enlightenment as the responsible party for loosening social cohesion. This is also explanatory for Ratzinger’s observations of the West in *Crisis* and *Regensburg*. Taylor’s criticism is simply bound up in his dissection of atomists, whose primacy of rights in the social contract was misguided and left out the relationship among freedom, obligation, and potential. For MacIntyre, the Enlightenment produced the autonomous, sovereign self, who by taking a detour from the group contributes to any meaning of particularism. MacIntyre writes that this individual is “totally detached from all social particularity. Anyone and everyone can thus be a moral agent, since it is in the self and not in social roles or practices that moral agency has to be located” (AV, 32). The danger in this is that every argument “is logically valid or can be easily expanded so as to be made so”;

however, the rival premises “possess no rational way of weight the claims of one as against another,” so there is no way to evaluate them (AV, 8).

MacIntyre also charges that, among the reasons the Enlightenment did not succeed, was that eighteenth-century moral philosophers “inherited incoherent fragments of a once coherent scheme of thought and action,” and in this broken bequeathing they failed to “recognize their own peculiar historical and cultural situation” (AV, 55). In its most basic form, MacIntyre traces the fragmented classical inheritance back to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century shift to the idea that there are normative conclusions to be drawn from the way the world is (AV, 59). Along those lines of thinking, *Crisis* and *Regensburg* are an attempt to put dislodged pieces of European identity back together.

With Ratzinger’s grievances with the Enlightenment and modernity well stated, one must wonder why *Crisis* advocates a more welcoming position. It appears to be largely a matter of practical strategy and messaging. While highly critical of the legacy of the Enlightenment, Ratzinger’s *Crisis* address stops short of rejecting it and the entire modern project of philosophy altogether. Instead, he co-opts the Enlightenment by attributing its origins to Christianity, calling Christianity the religion of Logos, or reason, which is the basis of the Enlightenment. This leaves a prominent religious figure in a very curious position—if Christianity is the religion of reason, how does this help remove the widespread political relativism of which Ratzinger and the Church are so critical? This is difficult to reconcile considering the address is critical of modernity’s disposition to lead man to dominate nature, and the scientific uniformity modernity has imposed on the world. Yet on the surface, a peculiar marriage between modern reasoning and a religious tradition averse to moral relativism emerges. This seemingly incommensurable

connection is developed by reinterpreting Christianity as the religion of Logos, thereby opening an entryway to reintegrate God into the political fold. At the very least this interpretation promotes a *sense of the sacred* by calling for the preservation of an intellectual heritage. One wonders whether Ratzinger's echo of the *sense of the sacred* as put forward in this address is his way of softening agnostics and the secular world toward a willingness to recognize the utility of a deity, such as the practical advantages it brings to creating a moral equilibrium. Ratzinger's approach to religion and God as civil instruments can at times resemble Montesquieu's application of religion to correct defects of the political state when laws are powerless.⁵⁰ However, it is important to remember that he views sincerity as necessary for leading by example and promoting a lifestyle that is close to God. Any strategy to dialogue with the survivalist tendencies of his audience is to speak to those disposed to either the Hobbsian reaction to chaos or libertarian spirit of Nozick who need to be sold on an alternative ordering of government.

Regensburg's approach is to present God, Logos, and reason as one in the same to call attention to Greek influence in the Bible. Particularly, the lecture details three stages of Christian de-Hellenization as discussed above and rebrands modernity by identifying Greek such concepts as the mathematical structure of Platonism that survived in this new philosophical enterprise. *Regensburg* also explores the etymology of the Greek words used in the Bible, specifically God as the embodiment of Logos and rational behavior. Overall, *Regensburg* puts forth the criterion for the communal narrative—Hellenistic

⁵⁰ See the section titled "How the laws of religion correct the defects of the political institution" in Charles de Secondat Montesquieu, "The Spirit of Laws," Book 24, chapter 16, p. 470. Translated and edited by Anne M. Cohler, Basia Carolyn Miller, and Harold Samuel Stone, Cambridge University Press: New York, NY, 1989.

Christianity, which Ratzinger believes Europeans and their descendants should call on as an antidote for their identity crisis.

Ratzinger's social glue—one tied to a religious system that includes scripture, supplementary philosophy, and the history of language—is an example of his pragmatism. He is not about to abandon his reliance on objective standards and the universal nature of the Church, so while his reference point is larger, namely, Hellenized Christianity, he is using and defending it with practical considerations for social solidarity rather than divinity. His purpose is communitarian in that he fuses man into a system that binds him to a set of principles. Ironically, as much as Ratzinger works to fight subjectivism, he leaves himself vulnerable to accusations of this principle itself. He too is aware of this in his refutation that Hellenized Christianity is an example of inculturation.

The Communitarian Connection

The Poet and the Philosopher: The Narrative Solution

At a very basic level, instruments of common language help Ratzinger counter a European cultural crisis, especially if he is serious about Hellenized Christianity. One can view common language as that which is derived through a culture's collective stories, including philosophical dialogues. The narrative then becomes another form for positioning moral information and propelling individuals into a sense of obligation for their fellow citizens. One advantage the narrative method has in a religious setting is well

stated by Gerald Arbuckle: “Narratives are about creating identity in the here and now, all the while drawing on the myths of the past” (Arbuckle 2010, 64). The idea of a Christian narrative speaks to this idea.

It’s clear that MacIntyre views common language as a natural device for transmitting and receiving information, and that it could be an effective delivery mechanism for the Church. The challenge with relying entirely on narrative in the literal sense is seen in a classic tension within political philosophy: Who are better seers of the truth—the poets and storytellers who lie, or the philosophers? Socrates bans poets from his ideal city out of fear their works are imitations of life that obscure the truth and may harm the soul by clouding sensible actions (*The Republic*, Book III, 398a–b; Book X, 605a–c). Socrates also asserts that justice is a personal virtue in which each individual tends to his/her own task and destiny (*The Republic*, Book IV, 433c–434a), which finds itself within Walzer’s distributivist system aimed at circumventing domination across industries. The view is also a bit of a predecessor to the Christian understanding of treating others as one would want to be treated. Surely one can question whether this concept was imported into Christianity, marked its influence as a subconscious carry-over, or is simply a universal principle? What’s more concrete is that the concept is illustrated in a quasi-narrative format in a work such as *The Republic*, making it well prepped for a discussion that is of timeless relevance. With the Church, philosophy, metaphysics, and etymology are supplementary to the narrative text of the Bible. It is a system in which both the poet and philosopher can live and keep one another in check—the same act is performed when reason and revelation intersect.

Most important, the narrative context can also contribute to group and individual productivity. This is based on Taylor's idea that as all participants accept a feeling of obligation—which can also be constructed through narrative—to help their fellow citizens. This fosters an environment suitable for fulfilling human potentials. Taylor sees identity not as an autonomous act one fulfills or self-sustains; rather, one's "identity is always partly defined in conversation with others or through the common understanding which underlies the practices of our society" (Atomism, 60). Narrative then also has the power to counter the modern allowance (and later Rawls) given to *every* individual regardless of the intellectual capability and training to make judgments free of communal considerations, which in the end weakens the community. Sandel is less heavy-handed, but still argues that a strong community is constituted in "the shared understandings of the participants and embodied in their institutional arrangements, not simply an attribute of certain of the participants' plans of life" (*LLJ*, 173). Narrative is needed to counter the abstract individual, and Sandel makes a case for this. In one of his lesser communitarian passages, he argues that a community is not identified by "merely a spirit of benevolence, or the prevalence of communitarian values, or even certain 'shared final ends' alone, but a common vocabulary of discourse and a background of implicit practices and understandings" (*LLJ*, 172). Though metaphysical, a community's framework provides its own conception of justice since it contains a "framework of self-understandings that is distinguishable from and in some sense prior to the sentiments and dispositions of individuals within the framework" (*LLJ*, 174).

Hellenization and Narrative

On the communitarian parallel, a strongly Hellenized Christianity would certainly satisfy MacIntyre's yearning to bring back Aristotelian ethics. For the Church, it would make the classics relevant to scripture if only by engaging the critical mind. Returning to the Hellenized roots of Christianity also turns the individual away from modernism, or at the very least the pedestal its endless autonomy has been placed on. The act of integrating the Enlightenment into Church theology is an additional safeguard to modify or rebrand how the Enlightenment is understood.

There are a number of Greek parallels regarding the process of reflection that Ratzinger could have drawn on, though doing so would have downplayed scripture as mere literary expression. Socrates in *The Apology* states that the unexamined life is not worth living (38a). Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics* describes contemplation as key in the path to happiness (Book Ten, chapter 7). It's interesting to note that these examples of the unexamined and contemplative life echo Sandel's call for proper reflection. They also support the connection MacIntyre sees between moral language and identity—the idea of the good life as supported by either stories or lessons in classical ethics made people look beyond themselves. Within a clear narrative, an individual's story and commitments were clear since one's story was “embedded in the story of those communities from which they derived their identity” (AV, 221). One of the clearest parallels between the Greeks and Christ, which leaves one to wonder about the evolution of thought between antiquity and Christ, is expressed in James Schall's comparison between Christ and Socrates: “At the heart of Greek thought lies Socrates' affirmation that ‘it is better to suffer injustice than to do it.’ Catholicism itself, from its own sources,

not excluding its own reflections on Plato, is founded on the abiding truth of this Socratic principle” (Schall 2004, xv).

Looking back on the Habermas event’s focus on faith and reason (chapter 3), one can also see the value Greek philosophy, particularly the limits of human reason as handed down in the works of Plato and Aristotle, brings to understanding revelation. Schall describes one benefit from studying Plato and Aristotle as learning what the “‘unaided’ human mind can learn by itself” without the ‘stimulus of revelation’” (Schall 2004, 116). Again, the Greeks are seen as providing the necessary dialogue for understanding the limits of the human mind and where revelation can serve as a supplement.

Hellenized Christianity and the use of Logos are the particularism and underlying unity that Ratzinger is looking for; however, this makes for an odd connection: How can revelation be particular? Keith Ward offers some insights that make sense out of this oddity based on the notion of revelation context. Ward says that a “Divine communication,” may be “shaped to the interests and values of a particular society at a particular time” (1994, 25). This pairs well with Ratzinger’s fear that something essential is lost when de-Hellenizing the faith and its sacred texts, even with the intent to make them accessible to all. General accessibility has the potential to move the message into abstractness, freeing it from history. This was the error in Rawls’s original position when it disregarded subjective claims easily deduced through observation and reason, such as identity, culture, obligations, and so forth. Ratzinger’s notion from the previous chapter—*a sense of the sacred*—can be understood as an attempt to reconcile the values bound up in revelation and ethics with the cultural conditions of European history,

including its laws and unspoken customs. A Hellenistic renaissance would link the underlying values with the culture, while also turning away from modern liberalism. The next chapter, the analysis of this research project, looks at whether Ratzinger simply carried out an anti-liberal message developed by the Church for centuries or if he created his own version, as well as how Ratzinger's own communitarian theory fits within the discussions of the communitarian critique.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Introduction

The end of the previous chapter brought together concepts from the communitarian critique to show how they relate to the larger cultural system that Ratzinger's works constructed in four key events. This system largely consists of two fronts: a recognition of the shortcomings of unaided biblical interpretation and the limits of faith, and the identification of cultural common denominators through the concept of *the sacred* in the West, particularly the understanding of the Hellenized nature of Roman Catholic Christianity. Both fronts ultimately aim for behavioral requirements without overt dictation, which in turn helps correct moral disorder and curtail the spread of relativism. This chapter looks at each political philosopher in the communitarian critique in comparison with Ratzinger's work to determine whom Ratzinger aligns with and to what extent. Through this alignment, we also find the three themes of Ratzinger's communitarian thought: humility, obligation, and the Church's fight against philosophic obsolescence. I find that each author is relevant to some degree, with MacIntyre as Ratzinger's strongest ally and Walzer to a lesser degree of the four authors, though this is mostly due to the documents selected. As discussed below, a separate study using Walzer's *Spheres of Justice* to interpret Catholic social thought on economics and labor would be quite fruitful. Nevertheless, Ratzinger is still in dialogue with some core concepts of *Spheres*, most notably the definition of the social good identity (membership). He also has a lot in common with Taylor, followed by Sandel. MacIntyre is most relevant due to his emphasis on narrative as it relates to identity and social

cohesion, his critical approach to Enlightenment, and Ratzinger's network of cultural reference points, or the lack thereof, that he sees in Europe. Taylor's discussion of humility in the Aristotelian notion of human insufficiency is seen in Ratzinger's understanding of faith and reason, and equally important, in his comprehension of how generational connections help create solidarity and generate a broad acceptance of the common good. As for Sandel, first principles, reflection, the illusion of autonomy, and intrasubjective and intersubjective identities are at work in Ratzinger's views on relativism and the European cultural crisis.

To arrive at this diagnosis, we will first look at how well the four works of Ratzinger analyzed in this research project comport with the major themes of the communitarian critique in the aggregate, and then draw detailed comparisons with each of communitarian critique's writers. This concluding chapter then touches on the Church's anti-liberal tradition as a possible explanatory factor for why Ratzinger's works appear communitarian and whether he establishes his own unique communitarian vision as he seeks to reposition the Church in the post-modern world amidst a cultural and moral crisis without compromising its core—this seems to be an issue at the heart of all the documents analyzed in this research project.

Macro-Theme Assessment: Finding Humility, Obligation, and Obsolescence

The communitarian baseline constructed in chapter 2 provided six themes linked to the four major writers in the initial communitarian critique of Rawls and Nozick: 1) the insufficiency of human nature; 2) the Enlightenment and its legacy as an origin of moral

rot; 3) a challenge to individual autonomy; 4) responsibilities and obligations; 5) the primacy of history, particularism, and anti-hypotheticals; and 6) the power of narrative and language. Each chapter that focused on Ratzinger's works explained his texts through the usage of these themes, including discussion of some of the writers who contributed to each of these themes where it was deemed necessary. The discussion also illustrated where the content of these chapters fit within the three themes unique to Ratzinger's communitarian output. For instance, humility embodies the insufficiency of human nature and the challenge of autonomy. Obligation is its own theme, but it includes the topics of the narrative method and power of language since they are a means for fostering a sense of obligation. Efforts to confront obsolescence are present in the importance of history and particularism in achieving a social solidarity, as well as in the criticism of the Enlightenment and its successors.

In the Habermas encounter we saw the concepts of first principles and the criticism of modernity's primacy of will, choice, and self-autonomy, which showed the degree to which humility influences Ratzinger's rationalism. This is primarily seen in Ratzinger's proposal to consider whether religion and reason ought to place limits on one another and remind each other of their respective roles. The Pera exchange picks up this discussion and includes what role the Enlightenment and modern rationalism might have played in the proliferation of relativism and what contribution this made to the idea that European identity is at a point of noticeable decay that ought to be healed so as to avoid unfulfilled expectations of traditions and entice citizens to feel a sense of care and accountability for their fellow citizens. This challenge to relativism is comparable to the communitarian critique's attack on the individual decision-making process in Rawls's

perceived neutral and self-sufficient original position, as well as the accusation that modern rationalism (or even deontological liberalism) leads individuals to reinvent themselves inside a bubble outside of broader attachments—present or historical. In short, no intelligence is needed outside of itself (reason) for navigating the sterilized original position. The Pera exchange examines institutional movements that impacted identity and social attachments, particularly the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and modernity, that point to excessive autonomy as an underlying driver. Neither Pera nor Ratzinger identify it this way. Rather, they point to its effects, namely, relativism and weakened identity. In the *Crisis* and *Regensburg* events we then see Ratzinger's solution to create a sense of obligation: mending broken moral language and strengthening identity by way of Hellenized Christianity. This is a call for the primacy of history and how one's heritage ought to be recaptured rather than treating it as a commodity that is no longer in good working order. This might not be known to Ratzinger, but what he is doing here is utilizing what Taylor's considers the value of generational obligation. Ratzinger's reinterpretation of the Enlightenment in *Crisis* seemed curious at first glance until one considers that Vatican II sought to engage the modern world, though one does wonder if this reinterpretation is half-committal. What does stand firm is Ratzinger's desire to bring God back into the public sphere. Reinterpreting the Enlightenment, an era that eradicated God from moral and political relevancy, is certainly one place to begin. This re-interpretation brings the Church back into the discussion of post-Enlightenment philosophy that embraces principles of scientific discovery and observation and previously reduced theology's relevance to a concept tantamount to an anachronism in today's world.

Communitarian Diagnosis: Alignments and Deviations

Liberal-Conservative Communitarianism

Before discussing each of the philosophers in relation to Ratzinger, it seems fair to make a distinction between conservative and liberal communitarians. One way this distinction can be seen is through their view of social customs—are they fixed to an abstract, objective principle or are they merely social constructions? MacIntyre and Taylor do a great deal of nodding to the *telos* (purpose) of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, as well as the idea that one has obligations that must be upheld so that all can reach their final end or potential. Both men are Roman Catholic, so one must wonder if this is their Catholicism coming through. These two also understand the state of nature with a respect for humility, which may signal a similar acceptance of the hierarchal system of the Church. This is not to say that other religious backgrounds would not lead their followers to this same premise; however, those in the secular world engulfed in the modern quest for self-sufficiency leave little room for revelation, or even simpler—intellectual humbleness. One could even levy the lack of humility charge against biblical literalists, who see no need for supplementary texts in understanding scripture. This point is clearly seen in Ratzinger's description of the three waves of Christianity's de-Hellenization. Standing across from MacIntyre and Taylor as much less conservative are Sandel and Walzer. These two see the definitions of identity and social goods as changing, but what Ratzinger does have in common with them is the idea that states need virtuous citizens capable of looking beyond their own self-interests as they understand the importance of belonging and customs that must be acknowledged in every day

transactions with their fellow citizens. Sandel describes this process as non-distant reflection and deliberation, while Walzer calls this self-respect a limited autonomy.

The question still remains: Where does Ratzinger stand on this liberal-conservative communitarian line? Is he with MacIntyre and Taylor, or he is with Sandel and Walzer? The answer is dependent on how Ratzinger views his narrative of Hellenized Christianity. Is Hellenized Christianity only fit for the West? If so, than one might say Ratzinger embodies the particularist approaches of Sandel and Walzer, though it is hard to set aside the moral disorder he sees in the deteriorating European identity and its moral decrepitude that came from relativism—this strongly resembles MacIntyre’s criticism of emotivism. Looking back to the Habermas exchange and Ratzinger’s proposition that sound reason leads the way from revelation, yet understanding that both have limitations on one another, there is still a supremacy of an objective or divine good that transcends particularist approaches. The particular event is merely the context of this divine principle or law. In that sense, Ratzinger is better understood as a synthesis of the liberal-conservative distinction in regard to customs and changing social meanings. It might be more useful to think of this in terms of how St. Thomas viewed the difference between natural and human law and their accuracy at accessing universal precepts. Thomas’s *Summa Theologica* asserted that the reason of humans is changeable, imperfect, and an act of the lawgiver’s will. Human laws contain particular precepts according to the conditions of their time. Therefore, human laws are subject to change

since they are crafted with an imperfect tool, whereas natural law is more durable since it contains some universal precepts, which are everlasting (Q97, A1, R1 and Q97, A3).⁵¹

MacIntyre: Narrative Discourse, Common Language, and Virtue Development

Ratzinger's proposition in the Habermas encounter that faith and reason must place limitations on one another is reminiscent of MacIntyre's suggestion that unchecked reason turns into pure will (AV, 47). Ratzinger's proposition of limitations is a safeguard for when reason reaches beyond its capabilities. In the same chapter, reason as understood in the Catholic tradition was found to be a logical navigational approach in philosophic inquiry after revelation is accepted. MacIntyre uses the same assertion that reason is a tool used to instruct rather than an end or value itself, as it helps transform humans from how they happen to be to realizing their potential in virtue development. This presents itself in Ratzinger's notion that faith is something that must be renewed and nurtured to reach its end, as well as the idea that reason informs a process to reach spiritual perfection. This point also reaches to the element of humility found in Ratzinger's understanding of faith.

While Ratzinger understands relativism to be the cause of value-incompatibility, which we could easily equate to the same moral disorder described by MacIntyre, it is actually the result. The driver is better understood in MacIntyre's terms as the disappearance of common language and narrative. For Ratzinger, the common moral language and narrative missing is the West's heritage, *a sense of the sacred* and a

⁵¹ Citations to the *Summa* here and in the subsection below on St. Thomas are for Question (Q), Article (A), and, when offered, Reply (R).

Hellenized faith. The pluralistic dilemma of objective-subjective distinctions is in both the Habermas and Pera exchanges. There is no easy side for Ratzinger to land on, which explains the system of limitations he places on faith and reason. If he looks to the purely objective route, he could find himself too strongly aligned with a faith that leads to fanaticism. He may also find himself in place akin to the purported objective, neutral, and the culturally agnostic environment of Rawls's original position. Ratzinger, like communitarians, has a great respect for the subjective conditions of sacred, local customs and mores that contribute to group identity. After all, he is explicitly clear that Europe is going through a cultural crisis with morality wrapped up in it. This is where the idea of narrative becomes very important. It is non-coercive and a natural way of processing and disseminating information, as well as placing one's own life within a history and tradition. The narrative model advanced by MacIntyre provides the binding obligations that Ratzinger is looking for. This mode counters the subjective disorder emotivism creates when autonomous conflicting first principles meet without any broader backdrop. Ratzinger is aware of this general idea as his arguments in the Pera exchange contain lengthy history lessons on the impact of religious institutions on Western thought. By bringing the West into contact with its history, traditions, and stories it creates intellectual and cultural homogeneity. Ratzinger's solution to pluralism is like that of MacIntyre's call for historical backdrop. Ratzinger's narrative aims to create a social glue that views Christianity as the religion of Logos based on etymological details on how Greek Logos found its way into the Bible.

One important difference to note between MacIntyre and Ratzinger is that while *After Virtue* is antagonistic to the Enlightenment—for example, he charges that the

eighteenth-century moral philosophers inherited incoherent fragments of philosophy (AV, 55)—Ratzinger’s *Crisis* and *Regensburg* events are an attempt to reassemble dislodged pieces of European identity. Still, both acknowledge the role first principles play in the integration of philosophy and religion in democracy’s protection of pluralistic viewpoints. Where Ratzinger was concerned with any viewpoint considered as valid as the next, MacIntyre explains this same issue as tracing rival conclusions back to first principles based on nothing more than assertions (AV, 8).

Taylor: Fraternity and Cultivation

As Ratzinger connects sacred customs to an identity, there is hope that one will feel an obligation to others that, in turn, will foster an environment in which all persons can thrive—this is primarily where we see an analogous relationship with Taylor. We also see a commonality between Taylor’s attack on atomism and Ratzinger’s various descriptions of relativism in a number of his texts and the dangers of unchecked reason in the Munich event.

Obligation is seen in the *Crisis* address when Ratzinger calls for a public morality that goes beyond the subjective standards of politics that lacks a sense of personal duty. Just as Taylor’s idea that society should allow all human capacities to grow, Ratzinger’s *sense of a sacred* aims for the same spirit of self- and group cultivation. In the exploration of one’s heritage—the route to discovering *the sacred*—an individual would likely begin to develop meaningful obligations to his/her community after seeing the connections between one’s contemporaries and their ancestors. One of Ratzinger’s

criticisms of the Enlightenment in *Crisis* held that the movement detached man from moral obligations through its limitless liberty. This detachment is part of the insufficiency and self-defeating nature of the Enlightenment. Without God, an intelligence that goes beyond reason itself, or a *sense of the sacred*, obligation is purely optional. Put another way, liberty as a superior value suppresses motivation to learn more about this *sense of the sacred* since a collection of values is a purely subjective matter lacking any scientific verification. Ratzinger's description of Europe's identity crisis and its linkage to relativism resembles Taylor's notion that identity is not as an autonomous act one fulfills or self-sustains, though Taylor goes a bit further by arguing that identity is a conversation one has with others through common understandings within a society.

One might look at Hellenized Christianity as one narrative with common moral reference points that create sticking points for generational connections. Taylor and MacIntyre in this sense are synergistic—the narrative mode can contribute to group and individual productivity since it contributes to an environment equipped to fulfilling human potentials.

Sandel: Identity Adviser

Sandel can be looked at as a resource that Ratzinger would be well-served to listen to for discovering new ways that the Church can contribute to either a collective narrative or marketplace of choices that contains core Church teachings that overlap with values that even the secular world recognizes. This is not to suggest coercive measures, but to float propositions, or as John Paul II once described the act of choice with regard to

matters of faith: “The Church proposes; she imposes nothing” (*Redemptoris Missio* 1990, no. 39). The act of searching for one’s *sense of a sacred* can become a proposition itself if the values discovered are found to be familiar and universal. For example, out of the mutual respect for the enterprise of multiculturalism—one of Ratzinger’s theories from the Pera exchange—individuals may begin to look into their own cultural heritage. In doing so, they might find the origins of their thoughts and values. They may then choose to embrace the culture that gave birth to them in order to stay true to the universal principle discovered and particular circumstances (culture) that brought it about. This raises issues regarding the objectivity of choice.

Sandel views choice as an illusion. If one can penetrate the reference points that these purported choices refer to in the subconscious for confirmation, than it is not coercive. One chooses the proposition because it is familiar and an already acceptable and verified option. Ratzinger, and one could also say MacIntyre, sees human choice as almost an arbitrary wielding that selects what is wanted based on one’s will and relativistic or utilitarian ends, whereas Sandel sees the choice as simply weighing options against recognizable principles and messages. It is the arbitrary decision that possesses the potential for perilous outcomes. The impact of true choice for Sandel is minimal since individuals are constrained to what they know. In addition to the *sense of the sacred* choice mentioned above, we might view Ratzinger’s attachment of the Enlightenment and Logos to the Church as one way that he is attempting to speak to the scientized modern and post-modern worlds. If these worlds are consumed by complete knowledge, why not assert that knowledge of the true whole must account for God, and therefore theology? In this sense, Sandel moves from advisory to explanatory.

Sandel's definitions of intersubjective and intrasubjective identities offer a framework to understand individual identity in the European cultural crisis described by Ratzinger. The notion of a European—or, even broader, a Western identity—is more multidimensional than Ratzinger's understanding of it as a single unit arbitrating morality while under threat from relativism. This is not to deny Ratzinger's claim here, but identity might be better looked at in its intersubjective composition of obligations to family, community, and class as well as national or larger geographical boundaries. These subsets are an equal force in the individual decision-making process as each person deliberates and accounts for these competing and intrasubjective identities. A community might be understood as literally one's neighborhood or immediate surroundings. It might also be seen as primarily linked to one's religious affiliation. Either way, each individual is comprised of multiple, and sometimes overlapping, identities. That said, Ratzinger's concern for European identity could be strengthened by relating the cultural crisis to the community and class levels. He sufficiently covers the family unit, though civic bonds and participation stand to be related to community at large. A discussion of class goes missing, though this could easily resurface with the Church's view on the rights of workers, and the benefits and limitations of the modern free market system. Surely in today's world these are important parts of one's identity that go beyond attributing accountability to such errors in philosophic heritage as relativism or extreme subjectivism, where there is no leash on reason.

Sandel's challenge to autonomy is seen in Ratzinger's balance between faith and reason in the Habermas event, particularly the role that choice plays in navigating the two. As much it may be believed that one has out of his or her own volition employed

faith or reason, or a combination thereof, one has only selected a choice that confirms embedded values. Therefore, neither the neutrality of reason—as advanced in the original position—nor the deference to revelation played a role in the decision process. Political socialization is what is actually at work here. Common experiences deserve consideration, as well as meaningful reflection to step back from superficial understandings of one's self that only validate previously held values. For Sandel, this accomplishes more than non-distant reflection. It is one way to approach the objective and subjective secular worlds that Ratzinger and Habermas worked to reconcile. Unfortunately, this comes down to a matter of first principles, and Sandel is not likely to be aligned with Ratzinger's view that reason is a guiding hand that leads from the foremost principle, revelation. Ratzinger and Sandel do show some alignment when it comes to reflection. For Ratzinger this is the power of restraint—the cooperative limitations between faith and reason. For Sandel, this is comprehensive and non-distant reflection, which is the antidote to the rigidity of Rawls's original position and its transcendental, objective claims. Sandel's notion of reflection as a means to negotiate community and identity would be of particular interest to Ratzinger, given it harkens back to Aristotle's idea of the reflective self which would aid in the difficult task of navigating objective and subjective tensions. This also would further bring Greek influence back into Roman Catholicism.

The discussion of first principles brings with it the tension between universalism and particularism, which for Ratzinger was the issue of objective-subjective distinctions, also interpreted as the inevitable relationship between faith and reason. Identity is a subjective matter to sort through in the reflective process described by Sandel. Both

Ratzinger and Sandel view identity as contingent on history. A potent and easily intelligible identity is clearly important for what Ratzinger sees as a cause for the political and moral malaise in the West, as well as the West's failure to live up to its own side of cultural exchange in multiculturalism. There are no strong communities in the West, or at least that is how it seems to Ratzinger, so it's no surprise that a salient identity is also missing. Here again, Ratzinger might be well served by one of Sandel's ideas, namely, that identity and social understandings play an important role in facilitating strong communities. The closest Ratzinger gets to this is his discovery (in the Pera exchange) that the European Union lacks a significant mentioning of Europe's identity.

Overall, Sandel is in less alignment with Ratzinger but offers complimentary solutions to the problems of identity and culture that Ratzinger is working through.

Walzer: The Changing Nature and Definitions of Power and Labor

Much of *Spheres of Justice* is too narrow for a parallelism as strong as the other theorists have with Ratzinger's ideas; however, Walzer's system of distributive justice could be discussed with the Church's social doctrine on economics and labor. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops lists seven themes of Catholic Social Teaching, four of which would profit from *Spheres* as an instrument for their advocacy: rights and responsibilities, options for the poor and vulnerable, the dignity of work and the rights of workers, and solidarity.⁵² The Church has a long history of addressing the economic

⁵² The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops lists the seven themes as: 1) Life and Dignity of the Human Person; 2) Call to Family, Community, and Participation; 3) Rights and Responsibilities; 4) Option for the Poor and Vulnerable; 5) The Dignity of Work and the

systems of socialism and capitalism, as well as the rights of workers within each of these respective markets. One could easily conduct a longitudinal study on how the Church has reacted to the changing conditions of the labor force in various economic environments and the social understandings of labor and the goods produced during those times. For example, beginning in the late nineteenth century, Pope Leo XIII condemned socialism altogether, along with nihilism and communism in the encyclical, *Quod Apostolici Muneris* (1878). Leo XIII then later softened his tone on socialism in *Rerum Novarum* (1891), advancing the rights of workers against exploitation in unbridled capitalism. *Rerum* then led to two direct follow-ups: Pius XI's *Quadragesimo Anno* (40th Anniversary) in 1931 and John Paul II's *Centesimus Annus* (100th Year) in 1991. These three encyclicals represent a dialogue in and of themselves, though there are others during this time range that could be included in this conversation.⁵³ *Rerum* cautions against the “cruelty of men of greed,” an acknowledgment of man’s nature (or at least some men), resembling Walzer’s idea that there is a spirit of domination in some humans that must be tempered through the distribution of power. This collection of encyclical letters is an attempt to curb this spirit of domination through a system of distributivism that allows a liberal free market to operate while a governmental conscience weighs in to protect the rights of workers, or as the Church sees it—the dignity of the worker. Today, we might speak of skills, education, and opportunity as a new definition of wealth and

Rights of Workers; 6) Solidarity; and 7) Care for God’s Creation. These themes are from the “Themes of Catholic Social Teaching” (2005), which is drawn from *Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 1998) and *Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2003).

⁵³ For example, *Divini Redemptoris* (1937), *Mater et Magistra* (1961), and *Laborem exercens* (1981).

power, and not so about much money or even property. The follow-ups⁵⁴ to *Rerum* re-endorse *Rerum* while at the same time reinterpret what power means at a specific point in time. This interpretive suggestion is made most explicit in John Paul's *Centesimus* when he says there is a need to interpret "new things" (hence, *rerum novarum*) as the "life of the Church and the world unfolds" and to "propose an analysis of some events of recent history" (no. 3) while also interpreting these new things in relation to the Gospel (no. 5). For example, John Paul calls attention to what property meant in Leo XIII's era—land ownership (no. 6). The power of unions is another area in which one might discover shifts in the Church's position. In *Rerum*, Leo XII recognized the value of unions in promoting the skills of artisans (no. 39) but said associations should be dissolved when they become dangerous to the state (no. 52). In *Centesimus*, John Paul II offers a more nuanced perspective, stating that trade unions play a pivotal role in negotiating minimum salaries for workers and safe and dignified working conditions (no. 15). Given today's global recession and the changing outlook on labor unions in the United States,⁵⁵ one

⁵⁴ *Quadragesimo* strikes a softer tone toward socialism at times, as Pius XI writes: "Free competition, kept within definite and due limits, and still more economic dictatorship, must be effectively brought under public authority" and "public institutions themselves, of peoples, moreover, ought to make all human society conform to the needs of the common good" (no. 110). However, he makes clear the ideology is incompatible with Christianity, as he goes on to write: "Religious socialism, Christian socialism, are contradictory terms; no one can be at the same time a good Catholic and a true socialist" (no. 120). On the 100th anniversary of *Rerum*, John Paul II's *Centesimus Annus* (1991) offers what can be considered an endorsement of liberal economic thought with a few caveats, including how power is distributed so that justice is not merely a matter of "giving from one's surplus" (no. 58). Written toward the end of the cold war, *Centesimus* is critical of communism, while accepting the right to private associations such as labor unions and describing a compensation system that sounds very much like a living wage.

⁵⁵ For example, a 2009 Gallup poll found that approval of labor unions in the United States was at an all-time low: 48 percent, down from 59 percent the previous year and considerably down from 75 percent in 1957 and 72 percent in 1937. A 2011 Gallop poll found this approval number only slightly higher, at 52 percent.

could say the Church needs to clarify its position on unions and at what point they are dangerous to the state, if ever. It is worth noting that in 2005, the Church entered this dialogue again, when Ratzinger (as Benedict XVI) took on this issue in his first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est* (“God is Love”). He warns that in the past when “[c]apital and the means of production were now the new source of power which, concentrated in the hands of a few, led to the suppression of the rights of the working classes, against which they had to rebel” (no. 26). *Deus Caritas Est* also recognizes the need for reinterpretation of the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (2004), as its “guidelines need to be addressed in the context of dialogue with all those seriously concerned for humanity and for the world in which we live” (no. 27). The interpretation of larger changes in institutional power may be too large for the window of Ratzinger’s works analyzed in this research project, but there are still a number of ways that his works are aligned with Walzer’s *Spheres*.

Walzer treats identity as a social good of membership, viewing it as a flexible commodity that produces a collective consciousness of common meanings that include language, history, and culture. These meanings help create a national character. This sounds a lot like what Ratzinger’s seeking to establish in Europe, albeit on a continent or hemisphere level rather than at the state level. Individual identities, according to Walzer, are formed out of the historical relationship of transactions between people and social goods. Ratzinger’s history lessons are launched in a similar fashion by explaining how the individual psyche and its morals were formed by the movements of cultural institutions in Europe. *Spheres* demonstrates the nature of shifting social identities and their meanings, which helps explain the problems the Church is confronting. Membership

as a social good provides something for Ratzinger to learn from as he struggles with how to approach a deteriorating European identity. Ratzinger's usage of European history and the particularist view he creates for Europe mirrors Walzer's desire to move away from Rawlsian abstraction to history. In the Pera exchange, Ratzinger addresses a cultural malaise that he believes has neutralized European identity. Bound up in this discussion is the modern movement's effect on Europe, which brings with it the ideological baggage of relativism. For Walzer, membership is not necessarily historical, but it is based on choices, as demonstrated in how he differentiates between how a group *is* constituted instead of how it *was* constituted. How does one sustain this vision? Ratzinger hopes that by returning to Hellenized Christianity, Europeans might remember their common foundations. To use Walzer's terms, this sounds like an attempt to reverse a choice of how the group *was* constituted rather than simply explaining the current situation.

One major difference that emerges between Ratzinger and Walzer is that *Spheres* accepts shifts in identity as a natural phenomenon over which there is little control. This stands in stark contrast to Ratzinger's attempt to steer the course of Europe's cultural crisis. Another area of difference between the two is that Walzer is cautious of religion since he believes it too is capable of breaching boundaries. Ratzinger does not appear to be breaching this barrier between religion and politics, but he is certainly looking to bring classical conceptions of the good, monotheism, and sacred customs back into the public sphere.

Comparing Ratzinger with General Communitarianism

Garden Variety Anti-Liberalism

There are two ways one could define communitarian theory at large: first, it could be thought of as anti-liberal or anti-modern theory; second, it could also be thought of as today's mainstream communitarianism⁵⁶ that positions itself as a political movement that, in simple terms, seeks a balance between rights and responsibilities as part of an effort to promote the common good and notions of strong community. This policy-driven version has also been described as a second wave of communitarianism of the 1990s (Bell 2010). Overlap between these two theoretical routes is located in their resistance to extreme liberal individualism when it becomes dangerous to a group's collective interests. Together, these two routes are what one calls "garden variety" communitarian theory.

⁵⁶ My definition of "mainstream" communitarianism is the communitarian political movement launched by Amitai Etzioni. The political platform of his organization, the Communitarian Network, is partly inspired by the writers of the communitarian critique and essentially aims at providing a balance between rights and responsibilities, between limitless individualism and extreme collectivism. Etzioni's positions, and those of his organization, are derived from several sources: Etzioni's *The Spirit of Community: Rights, Responsibilities, and the Communitarian Agenda* (1993); his *The New Golden Rule: Community and Morality in a Democratic Society* (1996); the Responsive Communitarian Platform (<http://communitariannetwork.org/about-communitarianism/responsive-communitarian-platform/>); and the group's communitarian vision statement (<http://communitariannetwork.org/communitarian-vision/>). While the group's platform roughly addresses the same issues as the communitarian critique, Etzioni and the communitarian political movement are excluded primarily on a content basis. The discussions on Rawls, Nozick, and liberalism from the traditional theorists (MacIntyre, Taylor, Sandel, and Walzer) are more germane to this research project since they're speaking to the development and history of political theory, particularly the Enlightenment and modernity, which takes center stage in the writings of Ratzinger analyzed in this research project.

While the common good is the implicit end result Ratzinger is working toward in these four events, it is the issues he deals with—pluralism, identity, and the role the Enlightenment had in birthing liberal individualism—that drive this final end, making his communitarianism more philosophically complex than either of the two theoretical routes. Whether standing in agreement or opposition, Ratzinger is clearly in dialogue with the communitarian critique's core set of concepts that deal with identity and solidarity in a historical and philosophic context. For Ratzinger, the pinpoint of this history is modernity.

To reconcile the Enlightenment with the Church, Ratzinger is taking a cue from Vatican II's attempt to engage the modern world. His is also a more complex view than that of the medieval Church since he has history on his side—Augustine and Thomas did not have the Enlightenment and modernity to critique in their works. He also has the advantage—at least from the document selection provided in this research project—of the perspective of a private theologian to explore philosophic concepts and their impact on history in greater depths than Vatican documents such as encyclicals that carry garden variety communitarian themes. The extent to which he can deviate from the Church as a theologian without jeopardizing his administrative role is certainly a constraint worth stating. He was a noted contributor to, and influence upon, some Vatican II documents (see chapter 1), so he is aware of the continuity his writings must have with the Church's vision.

The pre-Vatican II Church was a climate ripe in anti-modern/liberal theory, making it fertile ground for a disposition toward communitarianism. Joseph Komonchak, a scholar and member of the Catholic clergy, describes the Church's social positions

during the nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth century as a “counter-society” to the modern and liberal ideas of their time (1994, 77). Vatican II’s efforts to engage the modern world explain Ratzinger’s embracing of the Enlightenment in his *Crisis* address. Ernest L. Fortin provides insightful commentary and a summary of the Church’s reaction and relationship with modernism, which helps to put Ratzinger’s wish for reinterpretation and criticism of liberalism into a broader context. Fortin sees Europe’s initial critical reaction to modernism as a period that begins at about the Congress of Vienna (1815) and extends to the eve of Vatican II (1962). The encyclicals *Mirari Vos* (On Liberalism and Religious Indifferentism) (1832) and *Syllabus Errorum* (Syllabus of Errors) (1870) denounce modernism, whereas Vatican II’s encyclicals *Gaudium et Spes* (Religious Freedom) (1965) and *Dignitatis Humanae* (The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World) (1965) look for a way to reconcile modernity and liberalism with the Church. During the denouncement phase, “modern thought was portrayed, not as a simple aberration, but as something diabolical in root and branch—a universal conspiracy aimed at nothing less than the destruction of Christianity” (Fortin 1997, 141). The integrity of faith had to be defended “against the encroachments of modern philosophic and scientific thought” (Fortin 1985, 131). In looking at these works, one certainly sees what Fortin observed in them. In *Mirari Vos*, Gregory XVI calls science “impudent,” and liberty, “dissolute” (no. 5). In a similar tone, Pius IX’s *Syllabus Errorum* takes issue with the proposition that “the Roman Pontiff can, and ought to, reconcile himself, and come to terms with progress, liberalism and modern civilization” (no. 80).

From Vatican II forward, the tone of the Church is quite different. In *Dignitatis Humanae*, Paul VI affirmed that religious freedom is necessary, especially in pluralistic

societies, for maintaining the dignity of human persons and their place within a community. In *Gaudium et Spes*, he also addressed how human dignity ought to be preserved while viewing the growing need for community:

Every day human interdependence grows more tightly drawn and spreads by degrees over the whole world. As a result the common good, that is, the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment, today takes on an increasingly universal complexion and consequently involves rights and duties with respect to the whole human race. Every social group must take account of the needs and legitimate aspirations of other groups, and even of the general welfare of the entire human family (no. 26).

The above quote from *Gaudium et Spes* represents a significant shift from earlier rejections of modernity by the Church, as well as a consistent approach to account for a community at large. John Paul II, Ratzinger's papal predecessor, succinctly reiterates some of *Gaudium*'s principles and addresses the right-responsibilities approach in his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici* (1988), adding that:

Public life on behalf of the person and society finds its basic standard in the pursuit of the common good, as the good of everyone and as the good of each person taken as a whole, which is guaranteed and offered in a fitting manner to people, both as individuals and in groups, for their free and responsible acceptance (no. 42).

There is a lengthy trail of the common good in about a hundred and fifty years' worth of encyclical letters that firmly establishes the fertile ground in the Catholic Church from which communitarian ideals sprout.

The Common Good through Encyclicals

Encyclical letters speak of the common good in a variety of social contexts, reshaping and redefining what this means as history unfolds and brings changes in

institutional, economic, and social circumstances. *Rerum Novarum* (1891) speaks of the common good in terms of the general welfare and how labor and trade can benefit the economy (no. 34). *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931) is full of references to the common good, including one that resembles the communitarian tenant that the state ought to act in a way that balances the interests of the individual with those of the greater collective:

Just freedom of action must, of course, be left both to individual citizens and to families, yet only on condition that the common good be preserved and wrong to any individual be abolished. The function of the rulers of the State, moreover, is to watch over the community and its parts; but in protecting private individuals in their rights, chief consideration ought to be given to the weak and the poor (no. 25).

The state's role, particularly as it relates to protecting the economy, is also described in *Mater et Magistra* (1961), which contends that the state cannot be held "aloof from economic matters." The letter goes on to say that the state can never "shirk its obligation of working actively for the betterment of the condition of the workingman" (no. 20). Any charges of collectivism are set aside by *Pacem in Terris* (1963), which connects the common good with the protection of human rights, including a recognition of the U.N.'s Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a "step in the right direction" (no. 143). *Dignitatis Humanae* repeats the call for balance between individual and collective interests in terms of the protection of the "equality of citizens before the law," which is in "itself an element of the common good" (no. 6). While individuals have certain inalienable rights, Vatican II's *Gaudium et Spes* takes a Thomistic interpretation of man's insufficient nature by asserting that he is disposed to form communities and cannot live an isolated life. Therefore, others ought to create a society whereby all individuals can flourish and attain their fullest potentials (nos. 24, 25, 46, 47). While rejecting Marxism

and socialism (nos. 31–34), the letter states that this liberal ideology contains an “erroneous” individual autonomy and calls for “careful discernment” (no. 35).

The dark side of the liberal economic system is well addressed in the post–Vatican II era. *Populorum Progressio* (1967) is highly critical of unbridled liberalism, charging that it can lead to a form of tyranny when free competition has “no limits nor concomitant social obligations” (no. 26). *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987) asserts an interdependence of economics, culture, politics, and religion in sustaining solidarity and the need for a “persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all.” At odds with this is the “desire for profit and that thirst for power” (no. 38).

Sollicitudo also makes a compelling call for distributivism by acknowledging that solidarity hinges on recognizing all participants as persons. This principle is for both the rich and poor. John Paul II writes: “Those who are more influential, because they have a greater share of goods and common services, should feel responsible for the weaker and be ready to share with them all they possess.” While at the same time, he goes on to say that: “Those who are weaker, for their part, in the same spirit of solidarity, should not adopt a purely passive attitude or one that is destructive of the social fabric, but, while claiming their legitimate rights, should do what they can for the good of all” (no. 39).

Centesimus Annus (1991) discusses the dangers consumerism and environmental destruction pose for the common good (no. 36–39). This letter also calls into the question the infallibility of unregulated markets as this relates to the interests of all, asserting that the state should put into place a “defence and preservation of common goods” since they “cannot be safeguarded simply by market forces.” To steer clear of any accusations of

extreme collectivism, the same section of this letter calls for protecting the “legitimate pursuit of personal goals on the part of each individual” (no. 40).

Lastly, even as pope, Ratzinger has addressed the common good. His third encyclical, *Caritas In Veritate* (2009), describes the common good as “a requirement of justice and charity.” By striving toward the common good, individuals find themselves contributing to both the polis and other institutions as well as to a higher law or good. Benedict is raising the bar for the common good by freeing it, to a degree, from the state and connecting it to love. He writes: “The more we strive to secure a common good corresponding to the real needs of our neighbours, the more effectively we love them” (no. 7). The idea here is that while the state should be held responsible for protecting its citizens at all levels from exploitation, it is equally important to penetrate the behaviors and conscience of men to lead them to the good and the just. This same concept of persuading humans to perform just actions can also be found in the work of St. Thomas.

St. Thomas and the Common Good

In his works, *Summa Theologica* and *De Regno, Ad Regem Cypri (On Kingship, to the King of Cyprus)*, St. Thomas put forth some of the beginnings of deeper communitarian themes in Roman Catholic political philosophy. Questions 90–97 of the *Summa* deal with eternal, natural, and human law and their relationship to the common good, and they bear a notable resemblance to the communitarian critique’s thoughts on obligation, duty, and humility. Thomas sees moral obligation as what binds humans to law, and this cannot be done through force but only by attachment to the conscience. The

source of obligation is in the order or nature of things and how well human laws are in alignment with this (Parry 1963, v–vi). Just laws—those derived from eternal law—bind to the conscience of men and are aimed at the common good (Q96, A4).

Thomas also ties virtue to the common good. Virtue is ordained to, or promotes, the common good (Q96, A1, R3), and those who govern must be virtuous if the common good of the state is to flourish (Q 92, A1, R3). The difficulty of this task is that while there is a category of humans who can be willingly directed to the common good and virtue without coercion, there are those of a lesser nature who must be compelled (Q95, A1, R1). Thomas’s words here are ammunition for striking down the naiveté of Nozick’s *Utopia* and Rawls’s *A Theory of Justice* when these texts place too much trust in what Thomas would consider this second category of humans who are not pre-disposed to the common good without external forces creating an inner compulsion in them. In Nozick’s project, this also leaves the state unaccountable for protecting the dignity of the human in both working conditions and quality of life provided by fair compensation. If an overabundance of persuasion is needed to see and act on this, one might question if individualism has become arrogance devoid of a healthy amount of humility and forgiveness that blinds one’s concern for others.

The subjects of humility and human intellectual insufficiency appear in the *Summa* within the notion that while each person “knows the eternal law according to his own capacity,” no one truly comprehends it or knows the whole order of things (Q93, A2, R1).

Thomas’s outlook on how communities are formed is inspired by Aristotle’s *Politics*, in which the city is seen as a natural and inevitable entity that evolves through

various levels of association, beginning with the household to the village and eventually the political association of government. The city is held as necessary, for the demands of nature are too great to survive alone (Book I, sections 1252–1253). St. Thomas reiterates this in *On Kingship*, stating that “it is natural for man, more than for any other animal, to be a social and political animal, to live in a group” (Book I, chapter 1, no. 4). This natural and dependent way that communities form is embedded with an understanding that humans are insufficient to truly thrive on their own. In the communitarian critique, Taylor builds on this concept—and it is a safe assumption to make that he is well versed in the works of Thomas and Aristotle—to add that general obligations are necessary for individuals to reach their full potentials. Along those same lines, we see Ratzinger’s sense of humility in his view that both faith and reason have limitations; societal obligations are present in the way he seeks to create a Christian solidarity in the face of a cultural crisis.

Thomas’s *On Kingship* also sees the political regime and its ruler as necessary for directing humans toward their final ends, though reason also plays a role in this. Sounding very much like MacIntyre’s call for Aristotelian *telos*, Thomas writes: “[T]he light of reason is placed by nature in every man, to guide him in his acts towards his end” (Book 1, chapter 1, no. 3–4). Here, we also see the seeds for how Ratzinger, as well as John Paul II, view the role of reason and its limitations.

Final Thoughts

Where Ratzinger differs from general communitarian theory can be found in the answers to two questions: How do individuals feel connected to their community and a common good, and where can the common language (including philosophy) be derived from to define the interests of the whole? The concept of a common good is a social understanding in and of itself. A lot of disagreement and competition is likely to exist when incompatible ideologies are active in a society. This may also explain why the Church and Ratzinger have taken a softer stance toward modernism and are working to rebrand the Enlightenment. Another purpose of this rebranding is to re-enter a philosophic discussion that once found the Church obsolete. To feel obligated to one's fellow citizens or humanity at large, one must find security in insufficiency, whether this means tempering human survivalist tendencies in the state of nature and civilization or finding an intellectual stand that challenges both the neutrality of states—such as the Rawlsian original position—and the purported infallibility of a religious fundamentalism that omits sound reasoning.

Ratzinger's philosophy as a private theologian differs from the previous discussion of encyclicals in that these prior letters are largely about *how* the common good is applied. Ratzinger's theological works explain *why* it is applied and how to encourage its application from a socio-philosophic perspective. In this regard, his work more approximates the depths of Thomas than the straightforward doctrine of social thought produced by the encyclicals. One could also say this is nothing more than differences in stylistic form since an encyclical acts as a decree, announcement, or reaffirmation of the Church's position on an important issue and is typically addressed to

bishops, but is accessible to and read by the public simply due to the nature of the author's status as pope. Ratzinger differs from Thomas in that he is addressing a long history of political philosophy and the sociological impacts that history has had on identity. Metaphysical discussions are implicit in everything Ratzinger writes and no longer need to be addressed, save for how they are underlying positions related to creationism and directing good habits of faith and reason in the soul.

Although I have constructed a system through evidence primarily from Ratzinger's career as a private theologian, it does bear to question whether he is serious about all of this in terms of implementation, or is it merely material for philosophic dialogue among a select audience? The fact that he goes to great lengths in *Regensburg* to describe several stages that de-Hellenized the Christian faith seems sufficient evidence that he believes something went off track. If the Bible could be understood on its own terms without supplementary materials and linguistic interpretations, what does this say of the work of St. Thomas, who found a way to integrate the works of Aristotle into Christian theology? Can Christian scripture now be read without the insights of the *Summa* or his various commentaries on the works of Aristotle? Is this true for both the Old and New Testaments? The Old Testament (the Torah) was first written in Hebrew, so there is one layer of writing to work through before one even gets to the Greek translation. To complicate matters further, there is the view expressed by Jewish philosopher Moses Maimonides in the *Guide of the Perplexed* that the Torah was written on two levels—one the surface-level parable, the other a more deeper understanding only discoverable in the meanings of the Hebrew words.

The Enlightenment lands between stages one (the Reformation) and two (the liberal theology of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries) of Ratzinger's theory on de-Hellenization. In calling Christianity the religion of Logos, Ratzinger seeks to create a direct connection between the Enlightenment and the Church, though this seems largely by association except that he is serious about the cooperative relationship between reason and faith.

There are certainly some flaws in Ratzinger's Greek connections. How much Greek influence can we expect? In other words, how authoritative would the Church look if there was an excessive deference to Aristotle and Plato and a detailing of their influence on the Church? Also, one should question if Ratzinger's call for re-Hellenization is purely etymological. If so, are Aristotle and Plato of any use in understanding the metaphysical understanding of Logos? To gauge how serious Ratzinger is about the Greek language used to reconstruct the Greek version of the Old Testament and construct the New Testament, one should consider that his first encyclical as pope—*Deus Caritas Est* (“God is Love”)—discusses the frequency of usage of the Greek terms *eros* (human or passionate love), *agape* (unconditional love), and *eros philla* (the love of friendship) in the Bible. Mixed in with this commentary is a brief discussion of Nietzsche's claim that Christianity “poisoned eros,” turning “the most precious thing in life” to “bitterness” (no. 3). Ratzinger's discussion of Logos also returns in this encyclical to a passage about the Last Supper that equates the Eucharist to both the ancient Logos of eternal wisdom and, now more important, love and “self-giving” (no. 13).

There are number of lessons from the communitarian critique that Ratzinger could drawn on. Some communitarians are reluctant to endorse objective morality, but do point to a concept of a higher good and virtue, and at the very least reflection. This is most similar to the *sense of the sacred* that Ratzinger is getting at. When one considers how Ratzinger has woven this into cultural identity, it begins to resemble the conditional morality that some of the communitarians have endorsed, since their aversion to objectivity is based on the importance of historical and cultural considerations. Ratzinger also ought to consider the notion of primacy of identity and how to establish Christianity (or Catholicism) as an important sub-identity within the self since this seems to be what he's talking about. Sandel explains this as each human is a traveler of the various communities that they take membership in, some to a greater allegiance than others. Sandel also says there is no “‘*the society as a whole*’, or ‘*the more general society*’” (*LLJ*, 146). This principle of multi-membership is a dynamic element missing in Ratzinger's writings, namely, how the Church's membership can compete and reconcile itself among the many dimensions each individual's identity is comprised of.

One way to enter this internal conversation as a welcome visitor is through a viable narrative. MacIntyre asserted that through the narrative mode we understand the interrelationships among intentions, beliefs, and historical context (*AV*, 208). This is one tool of a non-coercive nature that could be set in motion without appearing as lobbying, the efforts of majorities, or the interests of the wealthy most able to mobilize themselves. It is not clear if Ratzinger consciously put together the narrative I have suggested is present in his works—scripture as understood by the requirement of relevant philosophy. What is clear is that the moral language missing from the public at large, which can be

provided by the narrative mode, is behind the concept of relativism Ratzinger attacks in many of his works. This is also the extreme individualism critiqued by all communitarians that destroys a social identity in which individuals feel connected to their various communities and in which one would have felt the weight of non-coercive responsibilities targeted at the individual's conscience.

Nozick is right—by the force of law it seems unjust to compel someone to act, even in a charitable act such as taxation. However, taxation is a passive act since one has chosen to participate in an economic system that contains the rule of taxation. It would be unjust for the government to force work upon its citizens that only benefits others. The Church offers a unique position since it operates outside of constitutional constraints and can influence behaviors in ways that the law cannot. While this is a minor concession to Nozick, it still points to something that from a standpoint of virtue does not sit right with natural compulsion. It should be made clear that Ratzinger does not stand against freedom; he recognizes it as “the basic structure of creation, to the spiritual existence of man.”⁵⁷ Ratzinger, like many political thinkers, is grappling with the issue of how to allow freedom without relying on the virtuous citizen entirely. Obligation and duty in the face of pluralism is *the* challenge all of the writers in this project are working through. For individuals to buy into the concept of the common good and an agreed upon set of principles, values, or collective interests, there must be a sense of obligation present in a

⁵⁷ The full quote this comes from is Ratzinger's interview in *God and the World: Believing and Living in Our Time* (2000 [2002]), and reads: “Freedom, on the other hand, belongs to the basic structure of creation, to the spiritual existence of man. We are not just laid out and determined according to a particular model. Freedom is there so that each one of us can shape his own life and, along with his own inner self, can in the end follow the path that best corresponds to his essential being. Accordingly, I would not refer to freedom as a grace from God but rather as a gift inherent in creation” (94).

population. It is not enough to believe in a theoretical common good—a connection is needed. To feel obligated and tied to the common good, one must be open to compromise and accept a variety of dependencies on others. When a civilization moves forward in a way that further atomizes the self, it becomes natural to feel that common criteria that once created this feeling of solidarity and obligation have reached a state of obsolescence.

Glossary

AV: *After Virtue* (1981) by Alasdair MacIntyre

ASU: *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (1974) by Robert Nozick

LLJ: *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (1982) by Michael Sandel

SOJ: *Sphere of Justice* (1983) by Michael Walzer

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