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# Secular Faith: Beyond Postmodern Reason and Religious Belief

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A. Kiarina Kordela

Although a central topic of both my research and teaching for some time now has been the relation between secular reason and (irrational) belief, it was through my participation in the Faculty Development International Seminar (FDIS) in Turkey that for the first time I realized the connection between my work and specifically *religious* belief. Having always approached the question from a secularist, atheist position, I had always addressed faith as the unconscious belief in some unstated *a priori* law, presupposed for our conscious knowledge to make sense. But I had never seen any connection between this mechanism marking secular, and particularly postmodern, thought and the postmodern phenomenon many call the revival of religious fundamentalism. My experience in Turkey, therefore, helped me grasp a phenomenon much broader than Turkish issues themselves, encompassing the overall relation between postmodern Western thought and the present position of Islam.

Ironically, it was through the implicit presuppositions of the Turkish secularist criticism of Islam as a political force, presented during our seminar, that I came to better understand the latter's importance as a historical and political function in the present global world order. Consequently, it is both to the constituencies at Macalester College that allow for and support the existence of the FDIS and to the Turkish secularists that my gratitude goes for having made me understand the extent to which Islam, for better or worse, currently is part of our own secular and capitalist world, rather than its *other*.

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I shall begin by focusing on a secularist Turkish writer's account of the dynamics of power and religion in Turkey since the 1980s, as they reflect themselves in party politics. In her seminar paper and essay in this volume, "Secularism and Islam: The Building of Modern Turkey," Binnaz Toprak explains how in the aftermath of "the 1980 military coup" in Turkey, which "was staged largely against the growing power of the Left in the 1970s...the decline of the Left [was] one of the most important factors in the rise of the Welfare Party to power." Unlike the Left, Toprak continues, "the Welfare Party was successful because it had learned the first lesson of democracy, namely, to answer the demands and interests of the electorate." The demands and interests in question "ranged from finding jobs, hospital beds...and attending weddings to distributing free food and fuel" as "the poor became poorer" because of the 1980s "cut down" of "state subsidies." Through "volunteers" among "devout Muslims" as well as "domestic and international Muslim capital," the Welfare Party "was able to integrate people who had been thus far marginalized by the secularist elite." Thus, Toprak concludes, "in sum, the success of the Welfare Party had less to do with its image as an Islamist party than with its activities in delivering material goods"—activities that before the 1980 coup would have been considered part of a Left-oriented political agenda.

In addition to the "first lesson of democracy," the Welfare leadership had learned the second lesson, namely, that it should "be engaged in 'normal' politics, business as usual so to speak," and "to attribute to the Party a responsible position on the Center-Right." On the other hand, however, the Party "had acquired a following precisely because [it] was more radical on the issue of Islam than the parties of the Center-Right." As a result, the Party eventually proved "unable to play this dual role," as "the more the Party was criticized for its discourse on Islam, the more radical the discourse became." The apparent conflict between the Party's philo-Leftist activities and philo-Islamic discourse raised the concern about "the 'real' as opposed to the 'hidden' intentions of its leadership," which "the media and public scrutiny of the Party was especially directed at understanding." Statements such as Party leader Erbakan's, "that his Party would come to power by shedding blood, if necessary, increased the public paranoia" and raised the question of "whether the Welfare Party would abide by democratic procedures or whether the leadership was hiding its intentions that

Muslims consider to be their right in hostile milieus." Reluctance to "abide by democratic procedures" was quickly likened to "the Hitler example," and "the question was being increasingly asked whether a democracy should allow political parties that would end up destroying it."

"In the end," specifically "in 1997," Erbakan was forced to resign... from his post as prime minister...the Welfare Party was closed by the Constitutional Court," and Erbakan himself "was banned from political activity." Toprak attributes the "major reason behind [the Party leadership's] defeat" to its "failure to understand the consensual nature of democracy," the fact that "it rests on compromise and consensus, i.e., on moderate politics." The broader historical result of this defeat was the rapid transformation of "the political arena into a tug-of-war between the secularists and the Islamists."

Let us pause at the year 1997 to note the classification constructed by Toprak's rhetoric in her description and interpretation of Turkish politics since 1980. The cardinal opposition is between the "secularists" and the "Islamists," two incompatible and inimical groups, insofar as the former stands for "democracy," defined as the "moderate politics" of "compromise and consensus," and the latter for the "right" to "shed blood, if necessary" "in hostile milieus," and consequently as the source of "political parties that would end up destroying [democracy]."

Passing now to the Turkish present since the election victory of the Justice and Development Party (JDP) in 2002, we see the secularism embodied by the JDP as "the success story of Turkish democracy," and far from excluding religious belief in Islam, it is "a guarantor of the individual's right to believe or not to believe in a faith," just as it is "an enthusiastic supporter of Turkey's entry into the European Union." In other words, although Islam bears within it the seed capable of destroying democracy, democracy is a system capable of encompassing Islam within itself. How is this paradox to be solved? Toprak's answer is succinct:

This history of Islamic political parties in Turkey demonstrates that a democratic environment provides both the platform for the organization of anti-system parties while it forces them to limit their sphere of action and to moderate their ideology...a democratic system works best to integrate Islamist movements into mainstream politics. The interplay of freedom of action and its limits in a democracy has a dynamic of its

own which leads potentially radical movements to play by the rules of the game.

In other words, Islam can be integrated by democracy insofar as it ceases to be bloodthirsty Islam, as defined above, and instead becomes one among other “movements” within “mainstream politics” that “play by the rules of the game” and have a limited “sphere of action” and a “moderate” ideology. Concomitantly, democracy’s great feat is its ability to safeguard “mainstream politics” and to integrate any possible challenge by transforming it into a part of itself—or else to ban it as something reminiscent of the “Hitler example.” If, therefore, as Toprak argues, the Turkish democracy of the JDP “stands as an example to the rest of the Muslim world,” it is because it has finally learned its Gramscian lesson and is now aware that its success depends on its ability to constitute a hegemonic power. This means both the “economically dominant, or potentially dominant, mode of production” and the “cultural, moral and ideological leadership over allied and subordinate groups”—and, above all, to do so through “consent” and “direction” as opposed to “coercion” and “domination.”<sup>1</sup> Unmistakably echoing Gramsci, for whom “hegemony is dynamic,” presupposing “that account be taken of the interests and the tendencies of the groups over which hegemony is to be exercised,” Toprak writes that the “process” of the Turkish secularist/democratic hegemony over Islam “works both ways” insofar as “system parties and power centers also learn that there are limits to how much they, in turn, can impose the system’s definition of rights and freedoms on substantial numbers of people who contest these.”<sup>2</sup>

As is well known, one such “right” currently negotiated in the European Union (EU), the United States, and the Islamic world (notably Turkey) alike is the women’s “freedom” to wear the Muslim scarf. Asked about her position on this question, Toprak saw no conflict between, on the one hand, either the current Turkish legislation granting the right to wear the scarf within the “private sphere” but prohibiting it within the “public sphere” or the American, French, and other European unlimited acceptance of the scarf, and, on the other hand, the “rules of democracy’s game.”<sup>3</sup> Are the rules of the game different in Western than in Islamic democracies? Then followed the relevant question of why she regards the public exhibition of the scarf in Turkey as threatening—recalling the possible resurrection of an Islam of the “shedding blood” type, rather than being associated with its moder-

ate, mainstreamed counterpart—whereas it is not in the U.S. or certain European countries. Toprak concluded that it is because the standards of life among the Muslims of the West are higher than those of their Turkish counterparts. Thus, we come all the way back to one major, yet currently forgotten (if not intentionally and fashionably ignored), point of Gramsci, namely, that, as David Forgacs argues:

Hegemony in Gramsci is sometimes interpreted as a relation *purely* of cultural or ideological influence or as a sphere of *pure consent*... Yet these interpretations seem to be mistaken. Gramsci stresses that 'though hegemony is ethico-political, it must also be *economic*, must necessarily be based on the decisive function exercised by the leading group in the decisive nucleus of economic activity.'<sup>4</sup>

Our present paradox is this: While in the countries canonically constituting the West, limitations on the use of the scarf would infringe upon human rights as defined by the rules of the game but the unlimited use of the scarf within Turkey would amount to a violation of the same rules *by the Muslims*. In the latter case, the presence of the scarf represents not simply a *cultural* right but an *economic* demand (and threat) to the mainstream system of Turkish democracy. Toprak's rhetoric inadvertently shows us (both in accordance with and against Gramsci) that what she calls secular "modernity and democracy" is a geographically and economically limited space, and that although "Turkey has been struggling to integrate itself with the modern world for two centuries" and "has achieved much in the process," nevertheless, "its drive toward modernity in terms of both its economic performance and its democratic record is far from complete." Because of the persistence of extreme economic disparity between the social classes—and it is no accident that the Turkish secularists are represented mainly by the middle and upper classes—Turkey encounters more problems than the core of the West in its attempts to establish a hegemony of the democratic rules of the game.

It follows, then, that "the fundamental divide" is not between modern secular reason and faith in Islam, but, as Slavoj Žižek puts it, "the one between those included into the sphere of (relative) economic prosperity and those excluded from it."<sup>5</sup> If the conflict of the postmodern global capitalist era between "secularists" (Western and others) and "Muslims" is increasingly aggravated, this is due to the fact that the "present model of late capitalist prosperity," lobbied under the univer-

salizing rubric of modern secular democracy, “cannot be universalized.” As George Kennan articulated it “with brutal candour more than half a century ago,” referring specifically to the U.S.:

We have 50 per cent of the world’s wealth but only 6.3 per cent of its population. In this situation, our real job in the coming period...is to maintain this position of disparity. To do so, we have to dispense with all sentimentality...we should cease thinking about human rights, the raising of living standards and democratization.<sup>6</sup>

Commenting on this passage, Zizek writes:

This, then is the *truth* of the discourse of universal human rights: *the Wall separating those covered by the umbrella of Human Rights and those excluded from its protective cover*. Any reference to universal human rights as an ‘unfinished project’ to be gradually extended to all people is here a vain ideological chimera.<sup>7</sup>

When the JDP acts as “an enthusiastic supporter of Turkey’s entry into the European Union,” it effectively endeavors to pass to the other side of the “Wall,” since the other major block of countries under the said “umbrella,” geographically and politically close to Turkey, is the one belonging to the EU. But the desire to enter this side of the Wall, far from posing any challenge to the given state of affairs of global capitalism and its divide, amounts to the most potent support thereof. By entering the EU, Turkey, like any other EU member, would effectively seal the contract to contribute to the flourishing of the European economy as an economic competitor and countervailing power to the U.S. and other major capitalist powers, such as China and Japan. And critically, this would occur *within* the arena of capitalist economy and according to its rules. Consequently, any objection to this plan, whether or not initiated by Muslims, expresses opposition to the present state of the global economy and its divides. On the other side, the response to this reluctance through the invocation of democratic values and human rights is nothing other than a concealed and cynical attempt to maintain (or obtain) a privileged position within the divides of the global world order. It is this realization that leads Zizek to pose the question: “faced with this project, do we, in the West, have any right to condemn the excluded when they use any means, inclusive of terror, to fight their exclusion?”<sup>8</sup> The least we could do, when we defend our-

selves against the violence of the excluded, would be to justify our acts in the terms of Kennan's candour.

One may argue that the present Islamic hostility against the West expresses a politically rational position that opposes itself to the state of global capitalism and its divide, rather than being the manifestation of irrational religious fundamentalism. Yet why does political opposition today, during postmodern capitalism, need to express itself in religious terms, rather than, say, in terms of a purely politically informed and oriented movement, as the Left used to do up until the collapse of the Eastern Bloc? I am not posing the obvious question of why the Left lost its credibility as an oppositional movement to capitalism. We know the answer. It is due to the fiasco of communism. This line of interrogation misses the point, however, since political opposition could, in the aftermath of 1989, still constitute itself in terms other than those of the Left. It could speak in purely secular, rational, and political terms, unalloyed by elements that do not meet the recognition and acceptance of secular and enlightened reason as legitimate political constituents (such as religion).

Rather, I pose the question in terms of subject constitution and self-representation. Why does a Turk, a Kurd, or any subject of an "excluded" nationality or ethnicity need to identify as a member of a religious faith in order to experience himself or herself as opposing the present political and economic world order? Why has the invocation of faith, as opposed to reason, become a possible—if not necessary—vehicle towards political opposition?

To respond to this question, I examine the mutations of secular historical time in postmodernism, which allow (if not require) faith, as reason's *other*, to make its entry onto the political stage.

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The fundamental paradox underlying secular reason may be succinctly expressed through the ambivalence of the concept *arbitrariness*. This means that secular, increasingly democratic authority always rests on precarious internal opposition. On the one hand, authority appropriates the absolute right to arbitrate. On the other, there exists the arbitrariness through which (since the collapse of aristocracy and the emergence of democracy) any given group finds itself occupying the position of authority.<sup>9</sup> The arbitrariness of secular authority goes hand in hand with the arbitrariness of history. It, too, unfolds between

and draws on two extremes. On the one hand, there is the arbitrary, tautologically posed yet absolute law governing history, which effectively presupposes the exclusion of contingent historical experience. Even when the latter is taken into account, it is interpreted only as a "symptom" of the law; that is, as something not contingent but *required* by the law. This conception culminates in the model of Hegel's notorious "Spirit of History" or "Idea." On the other hand, there is the arbitrariness of a history that does not constitute a determined totality insofar as it is not governed by any absolute law preventing anything from happening. This conception of history finds a range of expressions, from the extreme idealist Fichtean solipsism, in which the 'I' posits itself and history *ex nihilo*, to the moderate Marxian premise that "Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please...[or] under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past."<sup>10</sup>

The crucial point for our interrogation is that this paradox of authority and history, as Immanuel Kant showed during the heart of the Enlightenment, marks *all* secular reason. Less tolerant of ambivalence than we postmoderns, Kant named the phenomenon the "antinomy" or even the "euthanasia of pure reason."<sup>11</sup> Reason "falls of itself and even unavoidably," Kant argues. Contrary to the understanding, which "refers to experience so far as it can be given," it aims at the "absolute totality of all possible experience [which] is itself not experience" but a "*transcendent*" concept.<sup>12</sup> When I think of experience or history beyond what is actually given to my perception at the moment at which I am thinking, I've stepped out of the realm of understanding and entered the kingdom of reason, where I am staring at the transcendent "totality of all possible experience." The notion of change in history, not being given to my immediate experience, is therefore such a transcendent object, and reason could unambivalently know and represent an imminent change (or the impossibility thereof) only if it also unambivalently knew and represented the "totality of all possible experience."

This totality, however, fails to constitute itself, Kant tells us, in two regards: in the way of the dynamic antinomy, with regard to causality (e.g., the cause of everything in the world); and in the way of the mathematical antinomy, with regard to extension (e.g., the limits of the world).

With regard to causality, reason can prove two contradictory statements to be true: the thesis that "causality in accordance with laws

of nature is not the only causality...it is necessary to assume that there is also...freedom;" and the antithesis that "there is no freedom; everything in the world takes place solely in accordance with laws of nature."<sup>13</sup> In truth, however, Kant argues that there is no antinomy here, for "if natural necessity is merely referred to appearances and freedom merely to things in themselves" (the latter being also transcendent objects insofar as they escape our experience and cognition), then "no contradiction arises if we at the same time assume or admit both kinds of causality...to one and the very same thing, but in different relations—on one side as an appearance, on the other as a thing in itself."<sup>14</sup>

Before proceeding to the next antinomy, let me note that the dynamic antinomy became the cornerstone of Kant's political philosophy, grounding "civil society" in "freedom" and "obedience," as the double cause or law determining the actions of all enlightened citizens. Unconditional obedience and absolute freedom are addressed to the very same subjects, but in different relations: on one side, as "members of the community," where "argument is certainly not allowed—one must obey;" and, on the other side, "as a member of the whole community or of a society of world citizens," where one "certainly can argue without hurting the affairs for which he is in part responsible as a passive member."<sup>15</sup> Just as the freedom of the transcendent things in themselves guarantees the natural necessity of these same things *qua* appearances, in civil society, too, the exclusion of freedom from the concrete "community" into the transcendent space of the "whole community" of "world citizens" postulates absolute obedience as the sole cause within civil society. Thus, there is no contradiction in the imperative: "Argue as much as you will, and about what you will, but obey!" Or, as Frederic II put it more aptly: "Let them reason all they want to as long as they obey."<sup>16</sup> Ever since Kant, this is arguably the basic rule of the democratic game.

In abstract terms, the dynamic antinomy is the failure of reason presupposed for an unconditional law to impose itself on a totality, which is always heterogeneous, insofar as it presupposes as its exception a transcendent realm (e.g., that of "world citizens") where this law has no validity. We could therefore formulate the dynamic antinomy as follows: Everything is subject to the law *x*, under the precondition that there is something that is not subject to this *x*.

Turning now to the mathematical antinomy regarding the world's extension, reason offers two answers: the thesis that "the world has a

beginning in time, and is also limited as regards space" and the antithesis that "the world has no beginning, and no limits."<sup>17</sup> Both statements, however, are false insofar as the categories of time and space pertain only to appearances and not to things in themselves: "space and time, together with the appearances in them" are "nothing existing in themselves and outside of my representations."<sup>18</sup> The world can be said to be infinite or finite only *qua* appearance, *not in itself*. While we think that we are considering the world, in effect we are asking a self-referential epistemological question about the limits of "the series of conditions for given appearances," having as our referent our knowledge of the world rather than the world itself.<sup>19</sup> Hence, "enclosed in boundaries" or "infinite with regard to both time and space" is the series of conditions required for our knowledge of the world, and not the world itself, which cannot form a totality, whether infinite or finite.<sup>20</sup> Consequently, "I cannot say the world is *infinite*...nor...that it is *finite*," instead, "I will be able to say...only something about the...magnitude (of experience)" —not the magnitude of the world, which may or may not coincide with that of our experience.<sup>21</sup>

Since the object of the mathematical antinomy turns out to be cognition itself, it forms a homogeneous realm coextensive with spatio-temporality, and with no transcendent exception. Rather than posing transcendence as a distinct and delineated exception, this antinomy raises the unanswerable question of whether the world in itself coincides with that of our cognition or whether it also exists outside and independently of our experience thereof.

It follows that the mathematical antinomy provides us with "a *regulative* principle of reason" itself, as opposed to a "constitutive cosmological principle...of the absolute totality of the series of conditions, as given in itself in the object." Consequently, to mistake the magnitude of our experience for that of the world in itself amounts to "the subscription of objective reality to an idea that merely serves as a rule" of reason.<sup>22</sup> What escaped Kant was the fact that the complete *rule of reason* derives from *both* ways in which reason fails, the dynamic and the mathematical. In the antinomies of reason, Kant effectively discovered the paradox that thought operates within two temporalities: *logical* and *linear* time, or *synchrony* and *diachrony*.

When we examine causality, we operate within a synchronic time, in which, appearances to the contrary, a logical loop renders cause and effect simultaneous. Kenneth Burke explains this paradox succinctly: "Though there is a sense in which a Father precedes a Son,

there is also a sense in which the two states are ‘simultaneous’—for parents can be parents only insofar as they have offspring, and in this sense the offspring ‘makes’ the parent.”<sup>23</sup> The same is true of historical causality. The failure of the 1848 German peasant revolution, the late constitution of the German nation-state in 1871, the German defeat in WWI—all these events can be said to have contributed to the emergence of the Nazi phenomenon only after the latter has occurred. But the moment they are identified as causes of the said phenomenon, a hypothesis has freely been presupposed and posed as the absolute law determining this causal series of events; namely, that a country’s failure to keep up with the modern European development toward what Kojin Karatani calls the triad of “capital, state, and nation” is doomed to result in a monstrosity of the Nazi type.<sup>24</sup> Only this arbitrary (=absolute) presupposition allows for the causal linkage between these otherwise contingent events, just as its arbitrariness (=freedom) is evident in the fact that Nazism can also be reduced to other causes, as is the case in those historical interpretations in which capitalism is deemed the cause, or in Horkheimer and Adorno’s interpretation in which the entire march of history, since the time of tribes, magic, and mythology, is doomed to find its fulfillment in Nazism. In short, logical time, in properly dynamic fashion, always presupposes a transcendent “free” (and hence ideological) positing of a presupposition without which the law of causality established within phenomena would not apply.

By contrast, when we examine extension, we operate within linear time and consider everything in its diachronic succession. Thus, when confronted with the question about the limits of the world, since we cannot empirically know them, we are forced to admit the infinite regress in the series of our experience of the world, and to be unable to constitute the totality of the world, since there is no arbitrary presupposition that we can pose in this matter. Hence, the complete “rule of reason” consists in reason’s ability to perform both operations, the synchronic and the diachronic.

It was structural linguistics in the era of Modernism that drew attention to this paradox or “rule of reason.” As Joan Copjec puts it, Kant’s regulative “rule of reason” is the “rule of language” or of the “signifier,” which is a “genuine contradiction” insofar as “it enjoins us not only to believe,” in our diachronic mode, “that there will always be another signifier to determine retroactively the meaning of all that have come before”—or, in more explicitly Kantian terms, to believe that there will always be another condition in the regress of the series

of conditioned—but “it also requires us to presuppose,” in our synchronic mode, “‘all the other signifiers,’ the total milieu that is necessary for the meaning of one,” as “the simultaneity” or totality of all signifiers or “phenomena.”<sup>25</sup> In short, the rule of reason is the postulate of an infinite regress in the diachrony of signifiers antinomically coupled with the demand for the synchronic totality of all signifiers, which, however, cannot be formed but through the arbitrary (=free) positing of an exception.

Approximately half a century before structuralism, Marx had identified the same paradox in capitalist economy, as the governing *rule*, not of reason but of *exchange-value*. This postulates, on the one hand, that “the relative expression of value of the commodity is incomplete, because the series of its representations never comes to an end,” regressing to infinity—since there are “innumerable other members of the world of commodities,” including ever new ones. But, on the other hand, Marx’s rule of exchange-value also indicates that “the general form of value...can only arise as the joint contribution of the whole world of commodities,” since “a commodity only acquires a general expression of its value if, at the same time, all other commodities express their values in the same equivalent.”<sup>26</sup> For the totality of the field of exchange-value to form itself, one commodity (money) must form the exception against which the exchange-value of any other commodity can be directly measured, without comparison to all other (indefinitely many) commodities. *The rule of secular reason or of the signifier and the rule of exchange-value coincide.*

Crucially, however, the truth underlying and allowing for the antinomy of the rule of exchange-value or of reason is that of *set theory*, a theory that escaped Kant but not Marx. Examined from the perspective of set theory, the obstacle preventing a set from forming a totality is not the infinite regression in the diachronic series of its elements but the *self-referentiality of its synchronic totality*. In set theory, the set of all sets is defined as not-all (i.e., as not constituting a totality), not because we perpetually encounter yet another set, but because it cannot be decided whether it itself (the set of all sets) is included as a member of itself or not. Foregrounding the set theory in Marx, Kojin Karatani writes that, just as “Cantor...treated infinity as a number” whereby the set of all numbers (infinity) became a member of itself, and hence not-all, Marx, too, “by treating capital itself, and therefore money itself, as a commodity...identifies a paradox in which a class of the meta-level descends to the object level to occupy the same locus as the members;

in other words, to become a member of itself," whereby capitalism becomes a not-all, "deconstructive" system with no "transcendental center."<sup>27</sup> In Marx's words, if "gold confronts the other commodities as money [it is] only because it previously confronted them as a commodity," and nothing could have "won a monopoly" as the "universal equivalent" if it itself, "like all other commodities," had not "also functioned as an equivalent."<sup>28</sup> To ground his point, Marx offers examples of societies in which gold, furs, and other commodities/objects of utility were used as money. But in late capitalism, we do not need such examples, as we know that even paper money occupies "exclusively the position of the equivalent form" while remaining a commodity sold by credit companies. By contrast, the classical economists whom Marx criticized had conceived of money in properly "dynamic" fashion as a "barometer," an exception that is not itself a member of the world of commodities.<sup>29</sup> The antinomy or rule of exchange-value and of reason, therefore, emerges out of capital's and reason's failure to represent—what Kant called the "thing in itself," which turns out to be not a positively given entity beyond the field of representation—their own self-referentiality.<sup>30</sup> Yet, self-referential not-all sets abound in secular capitalist modernity. Beyond economy and all fields of representation, they comprise subjectivity itself.<sup>31</sup>

Here enters psychoanalysis. Since the failure of reason or representation always indexes the real (that which cannot be represented), psychoanalysis redefined the rule of reason or of exchange-value as the rule of sexual difference—sex being understood as distinct from gender or any other representable identity of the subject. Sex *qua* real is the failure to represent the subject as a self-referential not-all set, in which the 'I' (ego) is both the set of all sets (and hence in control of them) and a member of itself (as the de-centered or "deconstructed" ego of the subject of the unconscious). Having labeled totality, with regard to sexuality, as the "phallic function [F]," Jacques Lacan argued that the dynamic and mathematic failures to represent the self-referentiality of this function constitute the male and female sexes, respectively. The male totality or "man as whole acquires his inscription (*prend son inscription*), with the proviso that this function [F] is limited due to the existence of an *x* by which the function *Fx* is negated (*niée*)."<sup>32</sup> To return to Kant's political philosophy via Copjec, the (male) public sphere of law and obedience forms an *all* through the "*prohibition*: do not include freedom in your all."<sup>33</sup> On the other side, Lacan continues, the female sex does "not allow for any universality," it remains "a not-

whole, insofar as it has the choice of positing itself in Fx or of not being there (*de n'en pas être*)."<sup>34</sup>

Applied to history, self-referentiality indicates that (like money) any Master-Signifier (say, liberalism or communism) will always already have been the cause and end of history, if and when it occurs—and until then, it is nothing but one Master-Signifier (commodity) among others. Sexual difference indicates that any subject or group of subjects can relate to this radical self-referentiality of the Master-Signifier—the fact that the end of history depends on historical contingency itself—in one of two ways. The male way copes with it by turning this contingent end into an eternal “transcendental center.” We always already live in communism without knowing it; hence, because communism (will always already have) occurred, we are already doing something (which would be justifiable only if communism had indeed occurred). Thus, the male failure of reason involves a short circuit between present and future, eliminating their distinction.

By contrast, the female way misrepresents self-referentiality as an infinite regress with no “transcendental center.” Communism would have occurred, if it were the end of history, but history has no end, or, what amounts to the same thing, any end is the end of history.

Appearances to the contrary, both sexes can contribute to the sustenance of the *status quo*. The male failure can propel the self-referentiality of the Master-Signifier—x will always already have been the cause of y, if and when y will have occurred—to deteriorate into the inverted and perverted logic of totalitarianism. In other words, because y is (or will necessarily occur), we are already doing x now. And the female failure can infer that, if any end is equally legitimate, then any action is legitimate insofar as it can justify itself through some end. Thus, the female failure can arrive at the fatalistic justification of anything that *is* and the rejection of anything that is *not* as idealism, if not authoritarianism. Thereby, human desire and intentionality become the hubris of intervening into history in order to determine or alter its will, to make of history what it is not.

While canonically associated with essentialism and deconstruction, respectively, the male and females modes of reasoning (or, rather, of failing to do so) are more recognizable today in the West as the ostensible opposition between the Right and the Left. Their respective logics or sexes have become particularly transparent since September 11 and the U.S. reactions to it. Ever since, as Slavoj Žižek puts it, “the official American ‘philosophy’ of international politics,” as expressed

in “‘The National Security Strategy,’” is based on the premise that the “loop between the present and the future is closed.”<sup>35</sup> As an example, Žizek cites “the actor and ex-Congressman Fred Thompson,” who in 2002 argued, “in defense of President Bush’s Iraq politics,” as follows: “When anti-war protesters say ‘But what did Iraq effectively DO to the U.S.? It did not attack us!’ one should answer it with the question ‘And what did the terrorists who destroyed the Twin Towers effectively DO to the U.S. before September 11? They also did nothing!’” Thompson’s argumentation “presupposes that we can treat the future as something that, in a sense, already took place.”<sup>36</sup>

On the other hand, the American and European Left is convinced *both* that there is no proof of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq *and* that whatever actions the U.S. might be taking, they are, if not desirable, inevitable, insofar as capitalism and its world order are here to stay—the end of history being not the same as its own will, which is expressed in what *is*. This conviction is manifest in the Left’s passive reaction to U.S. politics after September 11. As Žizek remarks, after “the war in Afghanistan, the plans for an attack on Iraq, the new explosion of violence in Palestine: each time, there were muffled voices of discontent in Europe which raised particular points, and calls for a more balanced approach,” because of which “the big story in the media was the rise of Anti-American *Schadenfreude* and the lack of simple human sympathy with American suffering among the European intelligentsia.”<sup>37</sup> “The true story, however,” as Žizek argues, “is exactly the opposite one: the total lack of an autonomous European political initiative,” the fact that “Europe...took the path of ‘unconditional compromise,’ giving in to U.S. pressure,” that “there was no formal resistance, no imposition of a different global perception of the crisis,” and that “no official European institution risked a friendly but clear distantiation from the American position.”<sup>38</sup> Consequently, he explains:

these voices of protest died away—they were literally *of no consequence*, mere empty gestures whose function was to enable us, Europeans, to say to ourselves: ‘You see, we did protest, we did our duty!,’ while silently endorsing the *fait accompli* of American politics.<sup>39</sup>

Although the circumstances are ripe and “Europe is in an ideal position to start such an initiative” in which it would “distance itself clearly from the American hegemony,” and “the Left” could and “should unashamedly appropriate the slogan of a unified Europe as a counter-

weight to Americanized globalism," what actually happened instead, Zizek continues, was "the real politico-ideological catastrophe of September 11...an unprecedented strengthening of American hegemony, in all its aspects," whereby "Europe succumbed to a kind of ideologico-political blackmail by the U.S.A.: 'What is now at stake are no longer different economical or political choices, but our very survival—in the war of terrorism, you are either with us or against us.'"<sup>40</sup>

It is in this "reference to mere survival" that we encounter the transcendental free presupposition or "ultimate legitimization" of U.S. politics and hegemony, "a certain positive" and absolute "vision of global political relations," which "is silently imposed [also] on...Europeans," and which we can call as much our arbitrarily posed Master-Signifier as "political ideology at its purest."<sup>41</sup> For, if our survival is possible only insofar as we are "with" the "us" of the U.S., then the survival in question is that of "American hegemony," the Master-Signifier presupposed for the present American course of political action to appear as both legitimate and necessary. It is because this hegemony has in postmodernism become the premise of any action that would permit us to "survive" that the Left can only impotently watch the course of events, incapable of forming a front of opposition. The trauma of secular, specifically postmodern, reason since "the collapse of socialism" lies in the fact that, to cite again Zizek's words, "we are again accepting the notion of history as fate," so that whereas in the past the "idea was that life would somehow go on on earth, but that there are different possibilities," now it is "much easier for us to imagine the end of the world than a small change in the political system." The postmodern motto, expressing the Left and the Right alike, is, therefore: "Life on earth maybe will end, but somehow capitalism will go on."<sup>42</sup> If both Right and Left operate by starting from the same premise ("capitalism will go on"), then the entirety of secular reason exhausts itself within a politics that cannot oppose American hegemony. Hence, in postmodernism, opposition is conceivable only from the perspective of non-reason: *faith*.

This is also to say that faith is the repressed underside or presupposed cause/effect of postmodern reason. Generally, opposition to a system does not come *ex nihilo*; it comes from the system itself. The problem is that when it happens to come from the system's own repressed underside, appearances to the contrary, it effectively sustains rather than challenges the system. This was historically proven through so-called communism. Reserving the term *communism* for an

ideal that has never been historically realized, Guattari and Negri refer to the “ex-existing” communism as *socialism*. They describe the world prior to 1989 as follows: “Forget capitalism and socialism...Instead we have in place one vast machine, extending over the planet an enslavement of all mankind,” which imposes a “regimentation of thought and desire which terminates the individual.”<sup>43</sup> Capitalism does so by subjecting everything to the law of the accumulation of capital, that is, the law of surplus-value, which presupposes the transformation of everything into a commodity *qua* exchange-value. Socialism, by contrast, does so by subjecting everything to the law of need, that is, the total elimination of surplus-value and the transformation of everything into a commodity *qua* use-value. But each is simply the precondition of the other, just as use- and exchange-values are one another’s precondition. Thus, the historical function of socialism, from its inception to its collapse and beyond, has been the sustenance of capitalism.

And the same is true of the relation between postmodern reason and faith insofar as they are one another’s precondition. Reason can deconstruct beliefs and truths only insofar as they are there, just as one can have faith in something only insofar as it transcends what one can know through one’s reason.<sup>44</sup> To put it in Guattari and Negri’s terms, which make more explicit the connection between the reason and the economy of the same historical period, postmodern capitalism: “And what would such references to rationality signify anyway, in a world in which functionalism is strictly geared toward Capital, which in itself constitutes a maximization of irrationality?” — a faith in God-Capital.<sup>45</sup> If faith is presently monopolized by religion, this is so because postmodern reason represses it, that is, excludes it from its self-representations.

In other words, this essay attempts to explain why religious faith assumes its present political function but it is not a call to assume that religious belief is the effective opposition to the present system of capitalist hegemony.

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As Lacanians have often pointed out, the freedom of the subject—i.e., its ability to transcend the determinism of its self-representations—lies precisely in its sex: the fact that representation fails to represent the thing in itself, or, in other words, that representation is self-referential.<sup>46</sup> In terms of history, the subject is free precisely because there

is no pre-fixed end of history, since the end of history is constituted retroactively through its contingent events. To be sure, the same failure that guarantees the subject's freedom is that which also allows for what is known as ideological interpellation. If people can believe in one or another historical cause it is precisely because the Master-Signifier is posited arbitrarily.

Today, however, we in the West are experiencing a reduction of both ideological plurality and sexual difference to the fatalism of the inevitability of capitalism as both the end of history (and, hence, the state *sub specie aeternitatis*) and as the thing in itself, which now psychotically coincides with representation. The world (and its survival) coincides with its given appearance (American capitalist hegemony). In late capitalism, consequently, there is space neither for the real (which is perhaps why postmodern art obsesses with it) nor for sex (which is perhaps why mainstream culture obsesses with it). As Lacan once put it, "That's simply capitalism set straight...since anyway capitalism, that was its starting point: getting rid of sex."<sup>47</sup> Thus, given that postmodern reason and global capital have eventually gotten rid of sex and the real, not only does political opposition presently emerge as religious opposition (i.e., as non-secular reason) but, in the usual mirage of projection, it is religious opposition that is perceived as psychotically fanatic—reminiscent of the Hitler example that does not abide by the rules of the game of democracy (i.e., of the present global hegemony).

In other words, if we do not want change to be fully appropriated by religious faith (and, hence, to be fully reduced to something that sustains the system rather than effecting a genuine change), then we have to make secular reason once again capable of seeing the possibility of change—something which, above all, presupposes the ability of reason to see the present state of capitalism as one among other historical moments, rather than as our *a priori* premise and the end of history. This, in turn, is possible only if secular reason transcends its postmodern moment to acknowledge faith—be it in God-Capital or in change—as an integral part of itself. This does not mean a return to modernism and essentialism but a step forward, through postmodernism itself, towards the recognition of faith as the unstated presupposition of postmodern thought. This is properly secular faith. This essay, therefore, is rather a call to both the Right and the Left to dare to embrace their secular faith. ●

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## Notes

1. Toprak essay; Gramsci 1985, pp. 104–107; Gramsci 1988, p. 423.
2. Gramsci 1971, p. 159; Toprak.
3. In current Turkish discourse on the subject of the scarf, the terms *private* and *public* are not used in the usual sense we in the West attribute to them. The Turkish private sphere is much larger, including all fields for us canonically belonging to the public sphere except cases such as public appearances of politicians or state institutions like the University of Bogazici itself. There is also a gray zone, still being negotiated, which includes occasions such as politicians' receptions and other social activities. In other words, any woman can wear the scarf in the streets and other public spaces as long as her appearance cannot be interpreted as a direct representation of the state and the governing, secularist party.
4. In Gramsci 1988, p. 423; David Forgacs citing Gramsci 1971, p. 160, emphasis mine.
5. Zizek 2002, p. 149.
6. Kennan in 1948, quoted in Pilger, p. 98.
7. Zizek 2002, p. 150.
8. Ibid.
9. Note that this radical ambivalence toward arbitrary authority is a specifically secular concern insofar as political authority during the theocracy of the Middle Ages was grounded on divine authority. In other words, the monarch was the direct representative of God on earth, and not somebody arbitrarily elected by humans to rule them. The shift from theocracy to the secular centralized modern state and the entailed anxiety *vis-à-vis* the ungroundedness of secular authority is well documented not only in the political philosophy of early modernity (e.g., Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Vico) but also in literature, notably in the Baroque tragic drama.
10. Marx 1998, p. 15.
11. A 407/B p. 434; 1998, p. 460.
12. A 470/B p. 434; 1998, p. 460; §328; 1977, p. 70.
13. B472/A444–B473/A445; 1998, pp. 484–485.
14. §53; 1977, pp. 84–85.
15. Kant 1959, p. 87.
16. As cited in Foucault 1997, p. 34.
17. B454/A426–B455/A427; 1998, pp. 470–471.
18. Kant, §52c; 1977, p. 82.
19. Kant, B454/A426–B455/A427; 1998, pp. 470–471.
20. §52c; 1977, p. 82.
21. A 520/ B 548 and A 523/B 551; 1998, pp. 526, 528.
22. Kant, A 509–510/B537–538; 1998, pp. 520–521.
23. Burke 1970, p. 32.
24. Karatani 2003, p. 203.
25. Copjec 1994, pp. 205, 220.
26. Marx 1990, 155–156, 159.
27. Karatani 1995, pp. 69–70.

28. Marx 1990, 162–163.
29. Karatani 1995, p. 70.
30. Following a different path, Žižek arrives at the same conclusion in his account of the “sublime” (see Žižek 1989, particularly the chapter “The Logic of Sublimity,” pp. 201–207).
31. The self-referentiality or not-all character of sets is again a purely secular issue insofar as it is precisely the absence of a divine ground or guarantee that renders sets not-all. The democratic political system, for instance, is self-referential precisely insofar as it is the electorate itself (the members of the set supposed to be governed by an exception, the president) and not God that makes the president their legitimate governor.
32. Lacan 1998, p. 79.
33. Copjec, p. 235.
34. Lacan 1998, p. 80.
35. Žižek 2003.
36. *Ibid.*
37. Žižek 2002, p. 143.
38. *Ibid.*, pp. 143–144.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 144.
40. *Ibid.*
41. *Ibid.*, p. 145, brackets mine.
42. Žižek, as cited in Mead, p. 40.
43. Guattari and Negri, p. 7.
44. This was one of Søren Kierkegaard’s central themes. See, for instance, “Truth Is Subjectivity,” in his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the “Philosophical Fragments”* (1846).
45. Guattari and Negri, p. 27.
46. For an extensive elaboration of this argument, see, for instance, Copjec 1994, particularly the chapter “Sex and the Euthanasia of Reason,” pp. 201–236.
47. Lacan 1990, p. 30.

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