

KWDI – July, 2006

On the margins of meaning and the distinction of boundaries

Thank you very much for inviting me to speak here today.

It may be useful to divide my following remarks into three headings, a) Background, b) General Remarks, c) Orders of Distinction and Reintegration: As the title suggests, tonight I will speak about boundaries; I will begin by presenting the background to my interest in this problem which, I hope, will prove relevant to the overall talk. I will then proceed to some broad remarks about boundaries and their connection to the political realm in general and democratic regimes in particular. The third and final part of my remarks will be devoted to what we, I think, very sloppily refer to as fundamentalism. Here I hope to offer a somewhat different way to understand the dynamic behind these, poorly denoted movements and ideas.

My interest in the problem of boundaries – which I admit, is but one of many ways to present the issues I will be dealing with tonight - began about 8 years ago when I started working on the issue of tolerance and religion. During this period I have been devoting myself to both the theoretical and practical tasks of articulating a principled position of tolerance from within religious, that is from within what are always inherently particularistic, languages and sets of commitments. Along these lines I have written quite a few articles, and books – and have, with colleagues in the Balkans and the middle east, established a summer school on the issues of religion and public life, I have some brochures here. So, you can see that this is a project that I take rather seriously.

The upshot of all these initiatives is an attempt to predicate a politics and practice of tolerance that is explicitly at variance with the universalism of the Enlightenment and the attitude this universalism assumes in regards to the issue of boundaries. This attitude is perhaps most obvious in Article I of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (August 26, 1789) of the French National Assembly which states: “All men are born and remain free and equal in rights: *social distinctions can not be found but on common utility*. This statement represents a reconfiguration of the meaning of social or group boundaries along the lines of utility functions rather than constituted selves. This then, is a vision of society that does away with all publicly legitimated distinctions (and hence boundaries) except those predicated on common utility.

The implications of this universalism for the articulation of group identity in society is made clear in what is the classical enlightenment response to “the Jewish Question”, that given by Count Stanislaw de Clermont-Tonnerre in 1789: “We must refuse everything to the Jew as a nation and accord everything to the Jew as an individual”ⁱ. This became perhaps the paradigm statement of attitudes toward the other – his and her constitution solely as individual entities rather than as a member of corporate groups.

Now my point here is, that modern societies – defined let us say by *the Deceleration de droits d’lhomme et citoyen* and the American Constitution do not so much make societies more tolerant – rather they do away with group boundaries as constitutive of public

identities. In a sense this has been project of modern states, and in their liberal form even more than in other more romantic-national versions. Liberal modernity advances tolerance by doing away with particular identities and universalizing the terms of social membership, rather than by any real recognition and tolerance of difference and of the constitutive boundaries of individual and collective selves.

This remains the dominant attitude today that one encounters in many forums of the “international community.” Last December, for example, I was in Tirana for the meeting conveyed by USESCO on inter-ethnic and inter-religious dialogue in S. Eastern Europe. Chaired by the Director General of UNESCO and attended by the Prime Ministers of all the countries involved, as well as those of Norway, Hungary and representatives of many other countries the conference ended with a “Tirana Declaration” that called on individuals to “shed their rigid identities as a precondition for joining diverse societies” and called on all participants to commit themselves to having their children “cross ethnic and religious boundaries.” Reflecting on the thousands of dollars a year I spend on Jewish education for my children and what my wife and I have to deny ourselves in order to maintain this commitment – I realized that either I myself was a threat to a diverse society, or, that the framers of the declaration have got something fundamentally wrong when it comes to thinking about people’s identities and the role of boundaries in the constitution of such identities.

Now, perhaps this is a good opportunity for me to add that much of my work in these issues of religion, tolerance and boundaries has involved an intense and prolonged engagement with certain sectors of society in Bosnia and in Israel. Israel and the whole Zionist project is of course a quintessential modernist project, predicated on the idea of absolutizing boundaries between people, on the need for a homogenous nation-state of the Jewish people and the removal of the Jews from European societies – hence of course making for sheer boundaries between groups, not only in the logic of Israeli identity, but within European nation-states as well. The establishment of the State of Israel, following the genocidal murder of European Jewry is itself a response to the failure of Clermon-Tonnere’s dictum: the Jews, if you will, played the game, accepted the terms of privatized identity as the cost of integration ... and European society reneged on its part of the bargain and to a great extent destroyed Jewish life in continental Europe.

Bosnia presents very much a different side of the same picture. A traditional society, to a great extent, even under communism – the visitor to Sarajevo is struck by the proximity of Church towers and mosques, bells chiming and muezzin calls to prayer – a city-scape that combines architecture that one would find in any city of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, with that of an Anatolian village. The essence of Sarajevo before the war was perhaps best described by the move between the particular *mahalas* or neighborhoods and the city center the *Charshiya* or market. As explained in an evocative work by Dzevad Karshasan:ⁱⁱ

Upon leaving the Charshiya, all Sarajevans retreat from human universality into the particularity of their own cultures. Namely, every mahala continues the enclosed lifestyle of the culture that statistically prevails in it. Hence, Byelave, for example, is distinctly a Jewish mahala, whose everyday life completely

realizes all the particularities of Jewish cultures, life in Latinluk goes on in accordance with the particularities of Catholic cultures, in Vratnik in accord with Islamic cultures; and in Tashlihan according to the particularities of Eastern Orthodox Culture.

The war of course destroyed this reality with its iterated movement between particular and universal, as indeed it was meant to. It sought, and to a great extent the Dayton peace accords, ratified the division of the country into separate, more or less ethnically homogenous units rather than the pluralism that existed previously. The regnant view seems to be that people cannot live together, and that boundaries must be absolute. Or, contrawise – as the Tirana Declaration makes clear - the only way to live together is to erase all constitutive difference, to erase all boundaries and cross all divides. In one case boundaries are absolutized, in the other they are erased – which is also a form of absolutization if you think of it.

These seem to be the reigning paradigms in politics and I am not sure that those social scientists who are working on the issue are doing much to bring us to new ways of conceptualizing the problem. None seem cognizant of the simple truth that, as an architect friend of mine pointed out, boundaries both divide and connect, separate and unite. Anyone who has been disturbed by the goings on on the other side of her apartment wall, or anyone who ever had a dispute with a neighbor over the property line, knows the deep, visceral truth of this observation.

This dual aspect of boundaries is especially significant if we bear in mind what we know from the anthropological work of Victor Turner and others; that boundaries, in the form of marginal states and marginal groups can play very important roles in both defining and representing the solidarity of the group as whole.

David Nirenberg illustrates this issue wonderfully in the case of prostitutes in the Christian middle ages. The prostitute who belonged to no-man, neither father nor husband, but was the receptacle of all men's lust thus became "a concrete representation of a community of men united to each other by a common sexual bond. In the case of the fourteenth century Crown [of Aragon] this was a community delimited in terms of religious identity. All Christian males could, in the words of St Paul, "become one body" with a Christian prostitute, but through her (and this St. Paul did not say) they also became one with each other."ⁱⁱⁱ It is no wonder that prostitutes were known (and continue to be known in certain societies) as public women, *les femmes publique*. It is also no wonder that, as Nirenberg makes clear, concerns with miscegenation across the lines of religious communities (those of Christians, Jews and Moslems) was of such great concern in the fourteenth century Kingdom of Aragon – especially in terms of the prostitutes. The different communities maintained their own prostitutes and the granting of sexual favors across confessional lines was punished by death. The prostitute, the public woman, whose public nature was itself a function of her marginality thus in a sense patrolled the boundaries of the community – that very community or public that in a strange, counter intuitive way she came to represent. Note the irony, that it is precisely

the marginal or peripheral prostitute who plays a role in defining and maintaining the boundaries of the center and of the community.

Perhaps though the irony is more apparent than real, for indeed there is no center without its boundaries, and no public without its margins. The point is that the prostitute who could deny her sexual favors to no man within the community, was barred on pain of death to granting them to anyone beyond the community. The role of the prostitutes on the boundaries of the public defined and in some sense maintained that very public.

And here of course the case of the Jews, that other tolerated and marginal group comes to mind as playing a somewhat similar role. [Recall, the two categories of persons, formally tolerated in medieval Canon Law, were the Prostitute and the Jew]. For the Jew also, as it were, patrolled the boundaries of Christendom. The Jew did not so much define the Christian other as define the Christian self.^{iv} Christianity had, after all, defined itself in terms of the rejection of Judaism and of Jewish Law and posited alternative terms of fulfillment in the form of Jesus as Christ. More importantly, Christianity itself could only be realized at the eschaton when the Jews came to accept Jesus as Messiah. In some sense then the very triumph of Christianity did indeed rest (in fact until the Second Vatican Council) on the elimination of the Jews – not their corporeal elimination (which was why Jews were protected by Cannon law edicts on toleration) but their ideal or symbolic elimination in accepting the tenets of the Christian faith. Again we see how the very core of a community (the Christian ecclesia) is intimately tied to and dependent upon those existent on its boundaries. Christians cannot be free of the Jews whose final eschatological acceptance of Jesus as Christ will prove the truth of Christianity. And of course this was precisely the reasoning behind medieval cannon laws on tolerance – the need to maintain the Jewish presence as witness to the Second Coming. The Jew was hated, reviled, demeaned and often attacked. But he could not be destroyed, precisely because of his role vis a vis the very central tenets of Christianity.

Both Jews and prostitutes in different ways provided a similar function, both patrolled (to continue the metaphor) the boundaries of the Christian community - whether in terms of the family and sexuality or faith and community. Precisely their existence on the boundaries is what defined them, existing as what we may term Freud's "small differend", to the majoritarian society. In both cases, the margins, the boundaries, in a sense maintained the center. It is this role that makes those who reside on the boundaries the targets of anger, hatred and violent impulses as well. This is evinced all too often in the fate of minorities within majority cultures. To do away with the other, either by eliminating him (or her) or incorporating them thus allows us to patrol our own boundaries. However doing so means, by definition, destroying the other who is necessary for the very constitution of self. In Hegel's terms it is turning the other into a slave from whom no recognition is possible or worthwhile. The move to incorporate the other grants us perhaps safety (and control) but not recognition. Living with the reality of other's control is thus a situation of great fragility and uncertainty. The fact that our own boundaries are in the hands of another presents us with a frightening situation: less than total control over our very own constitutive terms of ordering, meaning and integration.

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I will begin by offering a set of hypotheses which you may think about and perhaps critique at the end of my talk. I am not sure all these statements are correct or universally valid, but in my thinking on these issues I end up returning to them again and again and so I put them to you, for discussion and critique.

Two: Boundaries both join and divide, bring together and distinguish. Even more importantly, they constitute the very existence of an object. As Martin Heidegger pointed out: “A space is something that has been made room for, something that is cleared and free, namely within a boundary, Greek *peras*. A boundary is not that at which something stops, but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something begins its *presencing*.”^v

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possibility of knowledge until at last it is relegated entirely to the sphere of the unknowable and becomes merely an X.”^{vi} It is, ultimately, only through the distinguishing, linguistic sign that the logical relations between things in the world are discovered, or as Heidegger would say, “made present”.^{vii} Distinctions and boundaries are thus inherent to the very structure of thought and to our use of symbols in thought. However fragile they may be – they are a necessary component of our very existence

The problem of boundaries; their constitution, limiting structures, organizing power and relation to what is beyond their purview is one of the central challenges facing us in the contemporary world. While the analytic dimensions of this problem are as old as humankind, the very proliferation of realms of knowledge and human interaction in a global environment make the problems ever more pressing.

Hence,

Four: The importance of the margins in defining the center - and the challenges that this gives rise to - is a truth that we know from both anthropology and psychoanalysis. Marginal states and statuses become precisely those social spaces where the identity of society is maintained and expressed. It is in that role that the margins carry the potential to provide an ongoing challenge and critique to society and its received knowledge. It is in this role that these margins become the live embodiment of that skeptical consciousness which is necessary to a life meaningfully led with other people. Precisely this existence on the boundaries is what led Sigmund Freud to his concept of “the narcissism of the small difference”. It is not the totally or far-off other who challenges me, my way of life, values and goals. But rather, he or she who is similar, but yet different – whose very difference thus constitutes a continuing critique of my way of being. These others are not so far removed from me as to preclude interaction and dialogue, but far enough distant to provide the crux of that definition and critique of self by other. However, to have another patrol one’s boundaries is an inherently unstable situation, one involving a great expenditure of psychic energy to maintain. And so as noted above, there is often a tendency to do away with the other who has such power over us.

There is, I believe, no final way out of this tension and the burden of living with the uncertainty of the other patrolling the boundaries of our own selves, whether collective or individual is no small burden to bear. Tragically, all attempts to overcome this tension, to relieve ourselves of this burden of the other and our discomfort at what we find difficult to bear – in the forms say, of messianic and millennial movements whether religious or secular in nature, as well as different forms of nationalist and ethno-national movements have all been disastrous in their consequences.

I would like to claim that this dynamic of boundaries and their inherent uncertainty brings us to the very contemporary political issues of democracy and globalization. For democracy as a form of political rule is identified most closely with a very particular idea of boundaries. Whether we identify democracy with the nation-state, as has been the case for the past 200 years, or with certain of the Renaissance city-states or with the ancient Athenian polis: In all cases democratic regimes present themselves to us as having very sharp boundaries, that is, as having clear articulations of who is inside and who outside,

who is a member and who not – as well as very clear definitions of the terms of membership. The recent French ruling on the head-scarf is of course a very clear, contemporary illustration of these attitude. But the work of many scholars, such as Eugene Weber in his important book, *Peasant into Frenchmen*, have shown us just how pervasive this historical process has been, how central to the making of the 19th century nation-state. We should note as well that within their boundaries democratic societies have always assumed a rather high level of identification of the citizen with the polis. A great degree of internalization of what the sociologist Edward Shils once called the “central value system” of society. (Note, not all social formations demand this – Empires for example, demand taxes, military levies – and can be quite coercive in their demands, but they do not demand the type of internalized identification with the centre that democratic nation-states demand).

I don't know if these characteristics of democratic regimes – the high degree of identification with regime combined with clearly defined, rigorously patrolled boundaries are indeed necessary conditions for the maintenance of democracy. It may be that they are. External regulation and authoritative coordination from above, as in authoritarian regimes are replaced with internal regulation and voluntary cooperation from below in democratic ones. To effect this one must therefore rigorously control who is allowed membership into the collective as well as insure a high degree of commitment to collective goals and desiderata.

I for one hope that the above are not – at the end of the day - necessary conditions for democracy, for I am both an advocate of democracy as well as one who is convinced that the conditions for maintaining the above characteristics of democratic regimes are fast disappearing. Globalization – the greatest experiment in boundary deconstruction we have witnessed – challenges both in the most aggressive of manners: Economically, militarily, cognitively, socially, politically – the hitherto existing boundaries of the nation-state are dissolving and newly emergent, cross-cutting divisions are emerging in their stead. I need not belabor this audience with all the by now all too familiar descriptions of the process. I only wish to point out that it would seem to have consequences for the type of cognitive grid upon which democratic regimes have seemed to rest from the beginnings of our historical record.

What is also by now a much belabored point is the reaction this process has engendered in the emergence of particularistic, ethno-nationalist and exclusionary parties and programs. Many of these exclusivist agendas are of a secular nature – and we have already noted the decisions regarding the head-scarf and other religious symbols in France. But some of these reactions to globalization are of a religious nature as well, in fact what we see in some places; such as the Balkans, the Middle East, the Indian subcontinent – is precisely the unholy marriage of a secular nationalism with a religiously argued system of legitimation.

This has proved an exceptionally dangerous union in the present circumstances; certainly as exemplified in the cases noted above. Moreover we have every reason to fear that this type of modern politicized religion, or religious politics is spreading and coming to define

issues of identity, meaning and so also social conflict focused on issues of identity and meaning, in the contemporary world. This is the case in Western China, in Chechnya increasingly in Western Europe, in parts of sub-Saharan Africa, the Central Asian republics, the Middle East and elsewhere: a truly global ideology if you will.

While I have no clear idea of how to counteract this development, I do think it is crucial to understand it and believe that simply naming all manifestations of religious action or belief that one disapproves of as “fundamentalist” is hardly sufficient. In the remainder of this presentation I will attempt to offer a new way of understanding these phenomena, drawing on some of the insights on boundaries offered above. The explanation I wish to proffer is predicated on some well known perspectives in anthropology and in semiotics. It will draw, to no small extent on the later, posthumously published work of Roy Rappaport

I begin by noting that all systems of meaning, symbolic as well as social, ideal as well as material are characterized by three different types or patterns of ordering, or establishing meaning, that is, in accordance with the hypotheses outlined above, with positing boundaries. The first, what has been called “low order meaning” is grounded in distinctions between entities – precisely those very distinctions around which the division of labor and social order is organized. It can be characterized by the expressions: “the cat is on the mat”. Meaning is conveyed through distinction (in this case between cats and mats). These are, to great extent the nature of the ordering of the economic realm, where the value difference between entities becomes the logic of exchange.

The second order of meaning, “middle level meaning” is characterized by analogies or similarities between such distinguished objects. Much of what is generally understood as symbolic meaning resides on this level. It can be characterized by the expression “my love is like a red red rose”. Allegory and metaphor are the residents of this level. Here, boundaries are somewhat blurred. They exist but are not absolute as in lower level meaning, nor eradicated as below.

For the final, “higher order of meaning” is one of unity, grounded in the identity or oneness, the radical identification of self and others; best characterized by such religious statements as “la illah illaallah”, or “shema yisrael adoshem elokeinu, adoshem echad”. And here of course, all boundaries are erased, as noted by Cassirer in his remarks on the “one” quote earlier.

These 3 sets of meanings are characteristics not only of signs and symbols – as pointed out a hundred years ago by the American philosopher Peirce - but also of social order. This was Rappaport’s point, that social order consists of both distinction and reaggregation, differentiation and re-integration. Thus, the very division of labor upon which our species life is predicated and on which economic exchange in a market is based are the realms of distinction and differentiation. The orders of aggregation and unity, can be identified on the mezzo level, what we termed mid-level meaning, with the workings of social empathy and trust (just as we can draw analogies in word play -my love is like a red red rose, so we can in affect - his pain may be like my pain (for Aristotle

this is what tragedy was all about): and this ability thus serves as the basis of empathy and generalized trust in society). Beyond this is the ultimate (highest) level of unity which is what is sought in religious rituals, observances and the gathering together in houses of worship across the world. The life of human beings in society is thus one that continually vacillates or moves between orders of differentiation and distinction and orders of reaggregation or reintegration and unity. When Claude Levi-Strauss discusses the “conjoining” effects of ritual, when Roy Rappaport analyses the liturgical order as establishing self-referential meanings, it is to this phenomenon of reintegration that they are, quite explicitly, referring. Here too then, that metaphysical unity, the “thing in itself” that Cassirer identified with what is beyond distinctions.

Now while there is perhaps nothing terribly new in this insight, we should go one step further and connect it with Niklas Luhmann’s theories of structural and system differentiation. For: the greater the social differentiation and the more the processes of social and economic distinction and differentiation progress (according to liberal/secular and scientific methodological criteria, which is really the logic of globalization), the more there is a need to reintegrate them at the level of a higher order meaning. This need cannot however be met from within the terms of differentiation and distinction (which only deals with differentiation itself). The result is a greater and greater push to reintegrate, but using symbolic orders that no longer define the terms of distinction and disaggregation. What has ensued is some of the most dangerous forms of religious sentimentality that we witness in today’s world.

Let me explain: in the religiously ordered universe, whether contemporary Quom in Iran or Bnei Brak in Israel or the worlds of antiquity, or medieval Europe - the orders of distinction and those of reaggregation were one, or at least shared the same logic. For the most important social categories and taxonomies were those which encompassed both the orders of reintegration (what we would call the religious orders) as well as those of differentiation (the organization of the division of labor). What we would call the language of religion was shared, or at least not sharply differentiated from that of the social division of labor. Laws against usury, or women in the contemporary workplace, or the organization of family law or of charity are cases in point (this was, to great extent the whole thrust of Islamic modernization in places like Pakistan for example, or in the organization of Islamic banks, that Timur Kuran has recently written about).

However, in most of the orders of the contemporary world, its system of taxonomies, exchange and differentiation, this is no longer the case. The relevant units of social organization (that is, those of distinction) are those taken from liberal/individualist utilitarian economic theory of one sort or another, while the language of reaggregation is, on the whole, that of religion divorced from worldly affairs, a privatized religion if you will. Various forms of militant religious fundamentalism, from radical Islamicism, to Hindu nationalism, to the religious commitments of the radical religious right in Israel – all attempt to overcome this distinction by re-imposing religious categories on the organization of the social order. Ridding the Land of Israel of Muslims, or the Dar-al-Islam of infidels, murdering doctors who perform abortions, attacking religious monuments on the Indian sub-continent (or for that matter, advocating a constitutional

amendment that would ban gay marriage) - are all attempts to overcome the chasm between the religious terms of meaning, transcendence and unity on the one hand and the simple fact that the taxonomic orders of the world do not, on the whole, recognize these orders of meaning. Hence the contradictory and often debilitating character of certain forms of religion in the contemporary world. The teaching of Hindu astronomy in India and the movements to reintroduce animal sacrifice among certain Jews in Israel today are similar, less political and more purely cognitive examples of the same dynamic, as are, for that matter, the growth of Christian banking in the USA among evangelical communities – where banker and client join hands and pray together in search of a good mortgage.

As we see, not all such attempts are violent, nor do all involve imposing on the social world of distinction and differentiation the religious orders of reaggregation. Some movements in fact seek the opposite, to reinterpret the world of religious meanings in terms of the secular categories of individual difference and distinction. This to a great extent is the phenomenon of New Age Religions, which stress individual fulfillment and expression. I recall some followers of Rabbi Zalman Shacter Shlomi in Boulder Colorado, members of Jewish renewal groups who in all seriousness redefined the Jewish laws of *kasruth* to mean free-range chickens – thus using modern, secular categories of meaning (happy chickens, cosmic coolness and yuppie status) to infuse religious terms of meaning (dietary proscriptions).

In some cases this trend penetrates even more traditionally organized religious communities and practices. Some of the new forms of radical right-wing religious Zionism in contemporary Israel evince a religiosity that stresses individual fulfillment and autonomy – thus taking over modern liberal and secular ideas of the autonomous and expressive self that are totally at odds with their own explicitly traditional understandings of the person as a subnomous entity under heteronymous injunctions. This is a very interesting development, especially because it shows that many of these groups are attempting to integrate the orders of distinction and reaggregation in both directions, if you will allow the metaphor. On the one hand, they do so, by seeking to transform the social and political orders of the world in a religious direction (through their exclusivist religio-nationalist policies). Thus imposing the logic or taxonomies of religious unity on the realm of economic and social differentiation. On the other hand, through articulating a religious vision that stresses modernist terms of individual meaning and fulfillment they are also attempting, if unconsciously, to reframe the terms of reaggregation and unity in the direction of the what are really secular orders of differentiation, that is of autonomous, distinct individual selves, each, in Bernard de Mandeville's terms "a little world in himself." A very similar logic, I would think is also at work in Hamas, Islamic Jihad and many other such movements in the Islamic world. And here I think we arrive at a much better understanding of what is behind so-called "fundamentalist" movements. We can in fact now understand them in relation to their sister phenomenon of New Age religiosity and the various types of spiritualism and spiritual practice common today. All are trying to overcome this chasm between the terms or taxonomies of differentiation and those of reaggregation, but going about it in very different ways. What is uniquely interesting in the so-called fundamentalist

movements, is the dual movement, if you will: Imposing a religious logic, the logic of re-aggregation on the orders of worldly distinction (bans on gay marriage say); while at the same time, subtly incorporating the logic of differentiation and distinction (individual expression for example) into their religious calculus. This is what I meant earlier when I referred to dangerous forms of religious sentimentality.

To appreciate this, compare these movements with, say, the impingement of the feminist movement on the organization of religious meaning and ritual action (as women become priests and deacons) – a more uni-directional movement, in the terms posited above. Here, by imposing the taxonomies of worldly order (gender equality) on the world of religious ritual, the work of ritual can more easily re-aggregate the divisions of the world. (Let us hypothesize that the world of market exchange – of first level meaning - where we must treat all sellers and buyers equally and which leaves us, at the end of the day with distinct, differentiated units, is better re-aggregated in the liturgical orders where the logic of equality is also at work – with women priests say - than where such equality does not apply. This certainly seems to be the case in Jewish communities, where in all non-orthodox synagogues, women not only read the torah, but 2,000 year old prayers have been rewritten in politically-correct terms) Where and when this works fine, the sense is however that whatever its efficacy, its social effects are much less deleterious for all involved than the violent attempts to bring worldly meanings in line with religious ones. For while certain people may not like the creativity of women administering the Lord's Supper, or laying phylacteries, or gay bishops in the Anglican confession, or Lesbian minister in the Methodist Church, or 2,000 year old dietary restrictions being reinterpreted to include free-range chickens there can be little doubt that these are expressions of creativity. They are certainly more creative than the blowing up of mosques, pizza parlors, discos and abortion clinics.

Let us not fail to note that the present situation is not only unlike the medieval world where both the orders of differentiation and of aggregation were framed by a common set of meanings that we would call religious. It is also unlike that of classical high, 19th and early 20th century secular modernism where either a liberal-individualist, or socialist (or at times fascist) framework posited a more or less unitary set of meanings which organized both orders of differentiation (in the economic and social realms) as well as those of aggregation and reintegration (in terms of the symbols of unity and self-referential meaning). Liberalism, socialism, communism, fascism – all posit not only principles of differentiation, that is of organization of the division of labor, of the recognition of difference, but also principles of reaggregation, of unity, and of solidarity. (Very different principles of course, but that is not our concern at the moment). The taxonomies of forced collectivization are the same as those of the May Day parade in Moscow. The reality may not be pretty, but it is not dissonant and that is the point I am making.

What we have now however is a divorce between the orders of distinction and differentiation and those of reaggregation and reintegration - the former are secular, individualist and universal the latter are religious, collectivist and particularistic. This situation can be compared to what Gregory Bateson once termed the “double bind” which

he famously related to the etiology of schizophrenia – a diagnosis that may not be far from defining our present state of affairs. The point I am making, is that both New Age religiosity as well as what are termed, mistakenly I believe, fundamentalist movements, are both attempts to overcome this contradictory situation, though in very different ways.

Unfortunately, many of these groups and movements seek such reintegration in a manner which posits and maintains clear and rigid boundaries, clearly delineating the outsider from the insider, and so perpetuate the lie of a self sufficient center constituted without reference to its boundaries, margins or limits. For the center to recognize the critical role of its boundaries would involve recognizing as well the inherent contradiction they contain between the terms of religious integration and those of secular differentiation. The boundaries and their contradictions would threaten to dissolve the center.

Yet we will always remain both dependent on that other who posits our own boundaries even as we bridle at that very dependence. We are condemned to coexist in the mutual tensions of these relationships. To accept this fundamental truth of human life, of the power of the other to constitute the core of our own existence on the personal level is what psychoanalysts would term ego-maturity, an eschewal of infant narcissism. To accept it on the collective level is what I would call tolerance, an eschewal of group certainty (whether religious or secular). To engage with it intentionally may well be the form of therapeutic or remedial action best suited to our present situation – an ethic of responsibility and not, as Max Weber warned against, of “ultimate ends”.

A mature discipline in face of the human condition is the best we can do if we are to avoid doing ill. This is perhaps not far from an idea of civility, of proper behavior, perhaps too approaching the Confucian virtue of *li*, that is of a propriety that, uniting the ethical with the legal sets reasonable limits to the satisfaction of desires. Echoes of the same virtue can be found in the Islamic idea of *hilm*, as in the Jewish concept of *anva* (both mean modesty). Translation – and with it, dialogue, a critical form of boundary work - can go well beyond the confines of Western monotheisms or secular political theories to embrace many different conversations, languages and others. To achieve this however we must approach the problem in new ways.

For, rather than opening ourselves up to dialogue we are closing ourselves off from the other. Our present condition is not so much marked by a “clash of civilizations”, or even by the now oft remarked “clash within civilizations”, but rather a “clash of civilization” (in the singular). Civilization, in the sense of an organizing center of values, goals and structuring premises can only exist when it is open to its margins, to its limits and boundaries. When it turns in on itself and abandons its margins, it abandons itself. “Civility” for Samuel Johnson meant, “politeness, the rule of decency and freedom from barbarity”. “To civilize” was “to reclaim from savageness and brutality”. In many respects our own conditions would seem to be of an increase of savageness and of brutality. The barbarians may indeed be at the gates – but only in so far as the gates are closed.

To remain open to the other and so to our own margins is a tremendously difficult enterprise. It involves recognizing our own extremely limited apprehension of truth, that transcendent Truth is, in its very transcendence, inaccessible to us. What must ensue from this realization is nothing less than a constitutive modesty in our epistemological premises. Truth can only develop in conversation, in dialogue – that is through engagement with what is beyond ourselves, and on our boundaries. What we reclaim from savageness and barbarism – may well turn out to be nothing less than ourselves.

ⁱ On this move and its more contemporary implications see: Michael Shurkin, "Decolonialization and the Renewal of French Judaism: Reflections on the Contemporary French Jewish Scene," Jewish Social Studies, 6 (2) pp.156-176.

ⁱⁱ Dzevad Karshasan, Sarajevo, Exodus of a City. New York: Kodansha International, 1993, pg. 9.

ⁱⁱⁱ Nirenberg, 155

^{iv} These remarks of course summarize a substantial literature, often contentious on the relations of Jews and Christians over the past two millennia. An excellent recent volume that surveys this literature is Miriam Taylor, *Anti-Judaism and Early Christian Identity: A Critique of the Scholarly Consensus*. Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1995. One of the classics of this literature upon which some of my arguments are based is David Flusser, *Jewish Sources in Early Christianity*, (Hebrew) Tel Aviv: Siphriat HaPoalim, 1979. An excellent study of how Christian liturgy and practice presented a set of boundaries upon which Judaism defined itself is, Israel Jacob Yuval, *"Two Nations in Your Womb" Perceptions of Jews and Christians*. Tel Aviv; Am Oved, 2001. See also, David Rokeah, *Jews, Pagan and Christians in Conflict*, Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1982, James Parkes, *The Conflict of Church and Synagogue: a study in the origins of antisemitism*, New York: Athenaeum, 1969.

^v Heidegger, *Poetry, Language and Time*, pg.154.

^{vi} Cassirer, *On Language*, vol. 1 *Symbolic Forms*, pg.76.

^{vii} Cassirer, *ib id*, pg.109.